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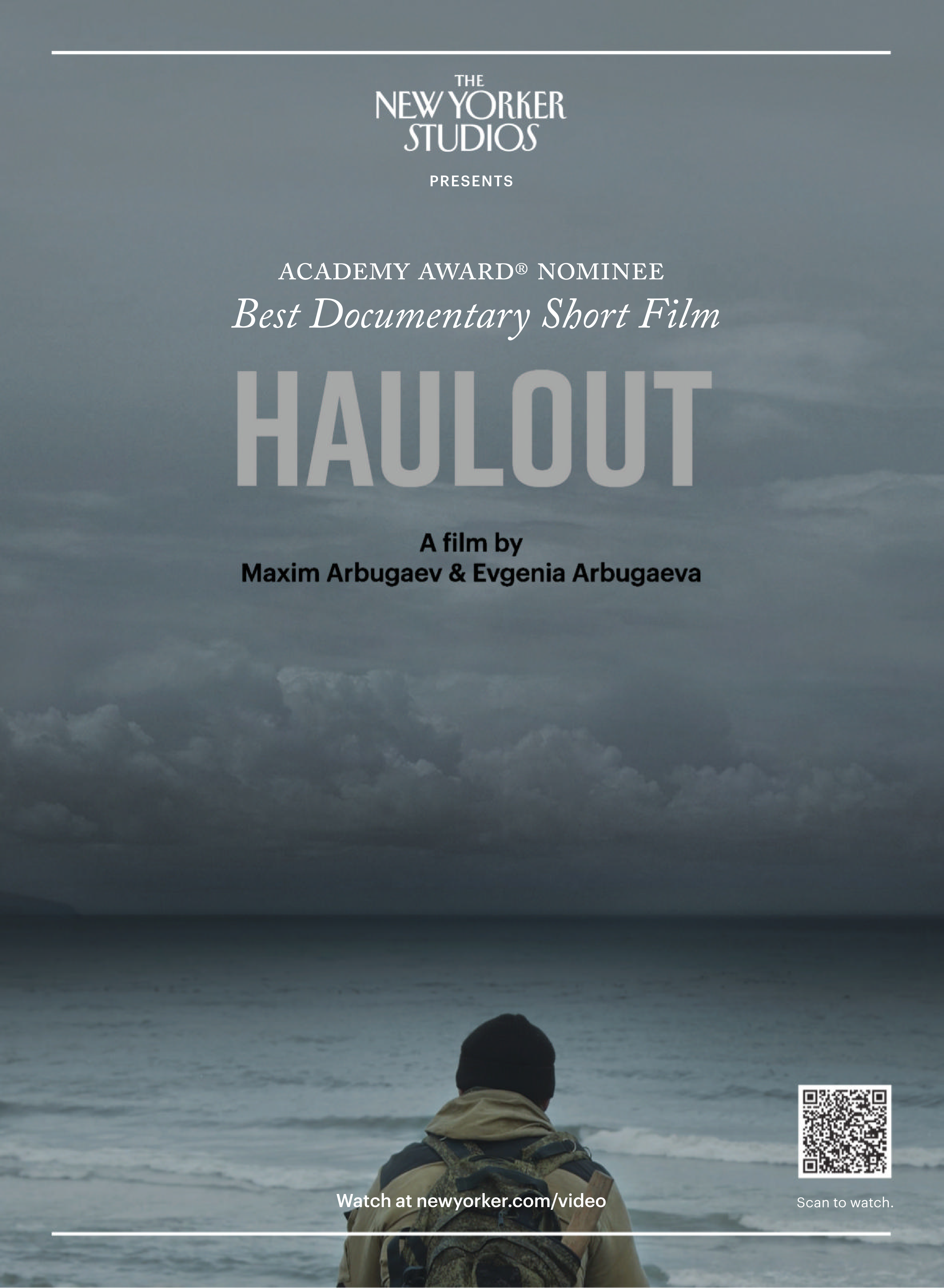

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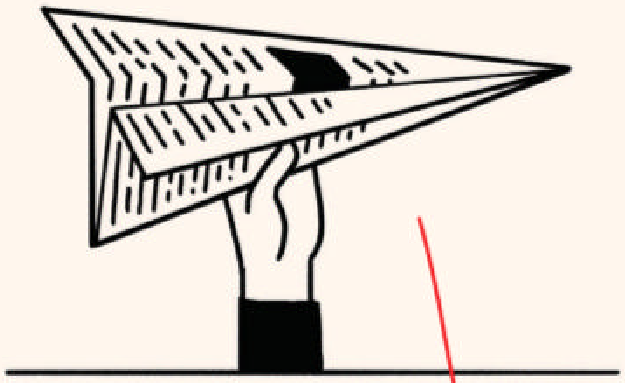

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THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

LETTER FROM LOS ANGELES

Emily Witt on how the Monterey Park community is processing the mass shooting that took place there.

THE NEW YORKER INTERVIEW

Rachel Syme talks with Kate Berlant about her cerebral standup comedy and her hit one-woman show.

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LEFT: MARIO TAMA / GETTY; RIGHT: ELIZABETH RENSTROM

THE MAIL

LOST AT SEA

As a journalist covering the refugee crisis in Greece, I commend Alexis Okeowo's article about the many migrants who have disappeared while crossing the Mediterranean ("The Missing," January 16th). The piece, however, could have further highlighted how European Union coast guards, particularly in Greece, are contributing to the deaths of asylum seekers by pushing them back out to sea, instead of rescuing them. According to the *Guardian*, E.U. member states have subjected some forty thousand refugees to such treatment during the pandemic, resulting in more than two thousand deaths. Last July, the European Court of Human Rights condemned the practice, even as the Greek government continues to deny that it is happening. This behavior must be called out, as it is an outright violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, and of Europe's post-Second World War promises never to endanger refugees again.

Helen Benedict
New York City

BEHIND THE WHEEL

I was impressed by Jennifer Gonnerman's article about the Teamsters and UPS ("The Total Package," January 16th). I started working part time for UPS at the age of eighteen, and now, twenty-eight years later, I am a full-time driver, as well as a shop steward for my building, representing Local 150. It was amazing to read just how many UPS employees throughout the country have gone through similar experiences to my own. I have had, and still have, the same nightmares; I remember the dreaded Gateway computer boxes; I've driven all day without eating, while seeing people having dinner, hearing kids splashing in the pool, and wishing I were at home, too. There have been plenty of evenings when I have delivered past 10 P.M. I have been followed. I have been verbally abused and intimidated. I have also experienced my share of sexual harassment.

I agree that the work culture can be ugly. The public sees us drivers without knowing how grim it can be inside the building. But the work does offer great benefits and good hourly pay, with a pension at the end. We call it "the golden handcuffs." A lot of credit should go to the drivers, who keep it together in public. We understand that we are the face of the company.

Monica Alcalá
Roseville, Calif.

Gonnerman's article lays out the many complexities of labor-management relations at UPS. I started as a part-time preloader in my local UPS warehouse in July, 2020, after COVID eliminated my previous job, in higher education. Business was booming, and, at forty-eight, I became a full-time driver. I work a Tuesday-through-Saturday schedule, along with more Mondays than I can count. In the past two years, I've logged more than five thousand hours on the job, injury free. I know that I represent the brand to the public, and I take that very seriously.

I'm also a proud Teamster. My union membership provides me with great health insurance and a pension. It also guarantees that I have job security. Without the union, UPS could treat its employees as disposable, the way some of its competitors seem to do. The conflict between labor and management isn't unique to UPS; it's endemic to any profit-seeking enterprise. What is especially consequential is that three hundred and fifty thousand UPS Teamsters can use our collective power to insist on greater fairness from the company—but only, as the longtime employee quoted in Gonnerman's closing paragraph says, if we stand together.

Martin Hughes
Spokane, Wash.

•

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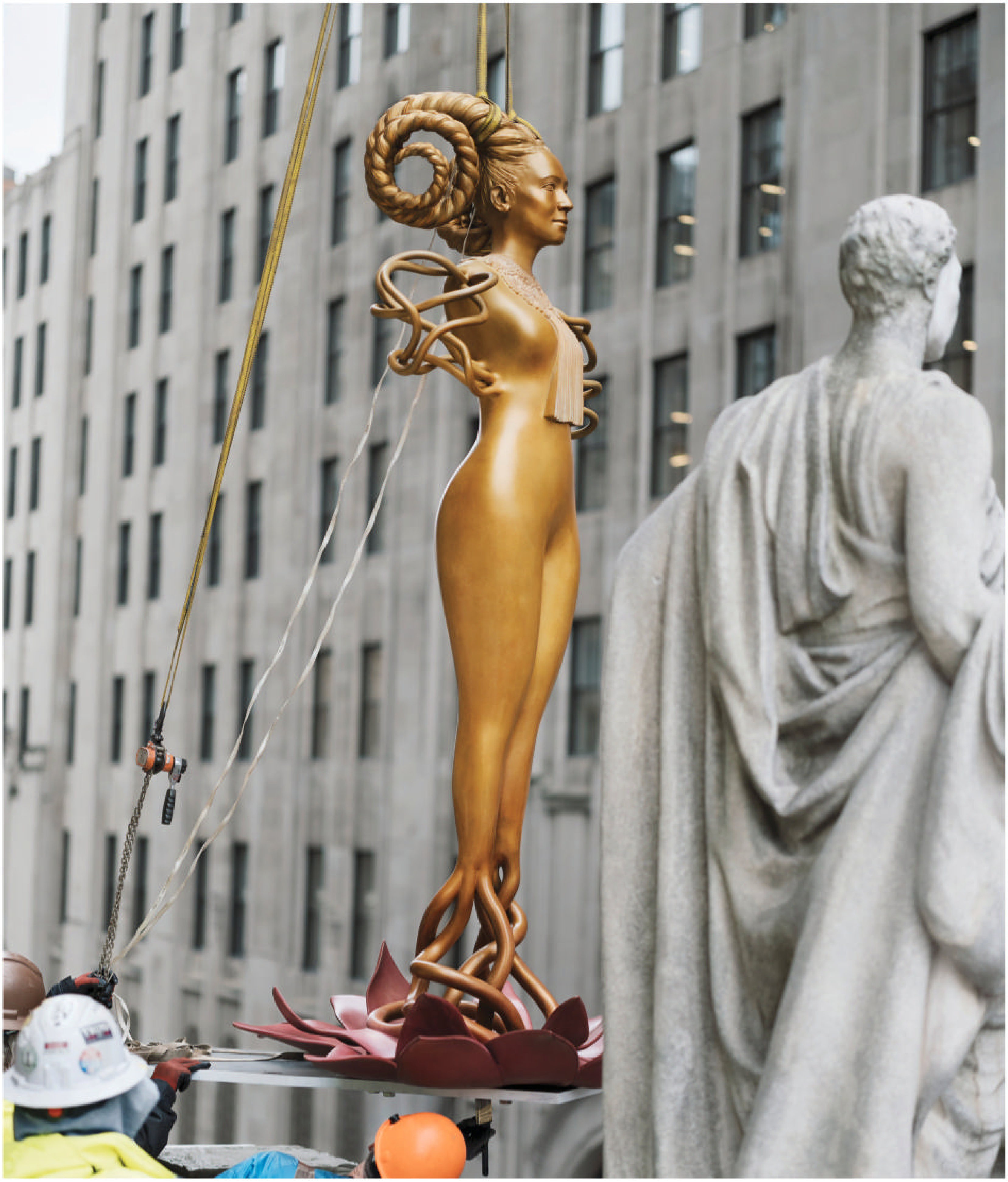
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Madison Square Park hosts the acclaimed Pakistani American artist **Shahzia Sikander's** first public project, "Havah . . . to breathe, air, life," a striking pair of female figures, on view through June 4. One sculpture appears on the rooftop of the neighboring Courthouse of the Appellate Division, First Department of the Supreme Court of the State of New York (pictured above, mid-installation). The second monument graces the park itself, where an augmented-reality component helps visitors locate her soaring companion.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN FRIGILLANA

As ever, it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

MUSIC

DJ Holographic

HOUSE A modern d.j. emphasizing disco—either in its spun-sugar seventies model or its sleeker, MIDI-driven early-eighties style—is in danger of seeming overly familiar. Ariel Corley, who performs as DJ Holographic, sidesteps these worries, or maybe side-stomps them; when you recognize a track, the urgent sweep of its surroundings tends to give it a new lift. A set recorded last year in her home town of Detroit is marked by a handful of tracks featuring explicitly sociopolitical lyrics, bracing and welcome in these hedonistic environs.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Good Room; Feb. 3.)*

Bob Dylan: "Fragments—Time Out of Mind Sessions (1996-1997)"

ROCK With "Time Out of Mind," issued in 1997, after a creative hibernation that verged on flatlining, Bob Dylan pulled off one of his greatest magic tricks: he moved from past tense to present. Like other artists of his vintage, Dylan had the stench of eighties roadkill—even unalloyed genius being no match for synthesizers and spandex. Suddenly, he had uncorked a masterpiece. Lovelorn and murky, with cryptic cool lurking inside every note, the album announced a hot hand, one that trailed the songwriter into old age. "Fragments," the seventeenth volume of his "Bootleg Series," revisits the work through five disks of outtakes, alternate takes, live recordings, and a slightly denuded remix. When Dylan is crackling, recordings ooze out. Faced with a hill—see another heartsick comeback, "Blood on the Tracks"—he second-guesses and workshops. His agita becomes a gift, as we witness the singer, abetted by the producer Daniel Lanois and an atypically amorphous studio band, trace a road map to a magisterial third act.—*Jay Ruttenberg (Streaming on select platforms.)*

Ethan Iverson: 50th Birthday Concert

JAZZ Give Ethan Iverson a chance to play with lauded figures from a few generations past and he's in clover. Celebrating his fiftieth birthday, the crackerjack pianist, formerly of the Bad Plus, welcomes two heavyweight dignitaries, the bassist Buster Williams and the drummer Billy Hart, for a trio romp. Reverent though he may be, Iverson, as he proved with the Bad Plus, brings an idiosyncratic feel to the music, according contemporaneity to all he touches. As intergenerational lovefests go, this one holds much promise. The following night, Iverson acknowledges his peer group with a full-fledged ensemble, stocked with such inventive improvisers as the trumpeter Jonathan Finlayson, the trombonist Jacob Garchik, and, indulging a quirky slant, Rob Schwimmer on the theremin.—*Steve Futterman (Jazz Gallery; Feb. 3-4.)*

Suzanne Farrin

CLASSICAL The ondes martenot, an early electronic instrument, looks like a miniature upright piano, but it wails limpidly, as though it were some morose yet peaceable ghost. The ondist Suzanne Farrin—who writes music with a strange, otherworldly air, with or without the instrument—is the subject of Miller Theatre's next "Composer Portrait" concert. The International Contemporary Ensemble joins Farrin for the world première of her work "Their Hearts Are Columns," with the soprano Alice Teyssier, and performs selections from her chamber opera "Dolce la Morte," with the countertenor Eric Jurenas (Feb. 2). Later, Miller welcomes the exciting Vijay Iyer Trio (Feb. 4) and the vocal ensembles Ekmeles (exploring the curiosities of Stockhausen's "Stimmung," on Valentine's Day) and Gesualdo Six (singing Renaissance motets, on Feb. 18, at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin).—*Oussama Zahr (Miller Theatre; Feb. 2.)*

Talib Kweli

HIP-HOP The Brooklyn rapper Talib Kweli made a career underground in the late nineties and early two-thousands, as a member of the duo Black Star—with Mos Def (now Yasiin Bey)—and as a soloist backed by Kanye West and J Dilla, among others. The son of university staffers and the brother of a law scholar, Kweli writes lyrics with an academic bent, reflecting his activism and his interest in the criminal-justice system. Time has turned him into a hallowed figure of sorts, and last year he reunited with Bey for a follow-up to their classic début. At this jazz club, Kweli fronts a live band as he performs songs from across his catalogue, in a string of shows featuring other hip-hop icons, including DMC, Slick Rick, and Rakim.—*Sheldon Pearce (Blue Note; Feb. 6-9.)*

Sister Nancy

REGGAE The Jamaican d.j. and singer Sister Nancy is best known for her dancehall classic "Bam Bam," from 1982, which has been sampled and interpolated into the musical consciousness for decades, by the likes of Jay-Z and Lauryn Hill. Another irresistible tune from Sister Nancy's sun-drenched début album, one that speaks to her current stature, is "Ain't No Stopping Nancy." Four decades on, the reggae pioneer, who has been based in New Jersey since the nineties, remains busy touring and recording, with a noted surge of activity since regaining her publishing rights and retiring from her more conventional occupation—bank accountant—in 2016. Last year, she collaborated with the young New York rapper MIKE, lucidly cutting through the bass-driven single "Stop Worry!" The rapper, long enamored of Sister Nancy's onstage confidence, has recalled watching her perform and thinking, This is actually what it's all about.—*Jenn Pelly (Market Hotel; Feb. 4.)*

DANCE

New York City Ballet

Although Alexei Ratmansky has been the choreographer-in-residence with American Ballet Theatre since 2009, it was at N.Y.C.B., with the ballet "Russian Seasons," in 2006, that he first came to the attention of New Yorkers. The most recent of his ballets there was "Voices," from 2020. A departure for this music-obsessed choreographer, it is set to Peter Ablinger's "Voices and Piano," a cycle of pieces that privilege speech patterns and intonation over melody and harmony. The words—spoken by the Persian poet Forough Farrokhzad and the painter Agnes Martin, among others—supply the rhythms, atmosphere, and textures for the dance, performed by five women soloists and an ensemble of five men. A further surprise: Ratmansky was recently named artist-in-residence at City

ROCK

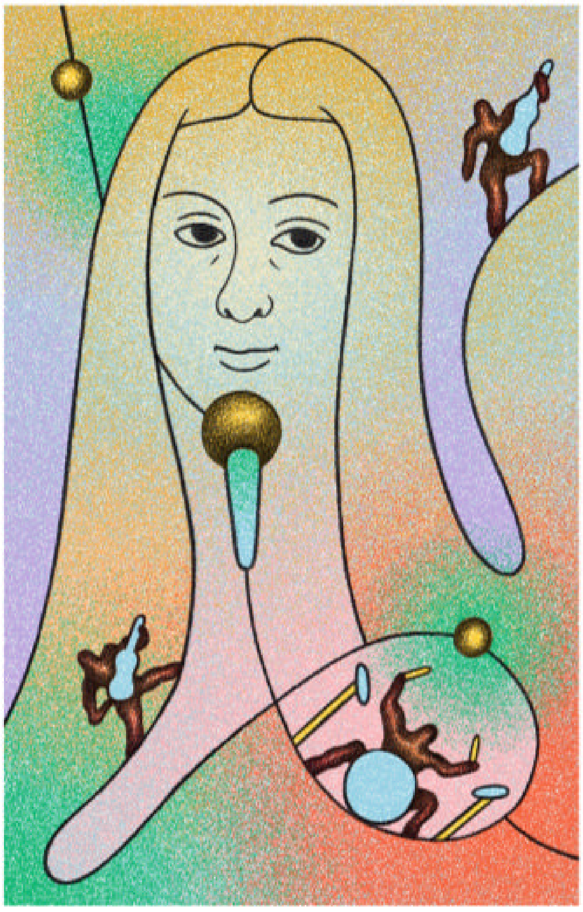


ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA MERAD

Is a song merely an inner monologue, allowed to glisten in the light of day? The four members of London's **Dry Cleaning** have, it might be said, put that notion to the test. Instantly recognizable as riveting post-punk of the British-art-school variety, the band's songs consist of droll, seemingly off-the-cuff lyrics, poetically delivered by Florence Shaw, a vocalist who prefers simply speaking, at dinner-conversation levels, to anything that might approach crooning or belting—even when the music behind her gets louder, bouncier, more serrated, and, at times, danceable. Exuding calm amid the squall, Shaw charms the listener with elliptical thought balloons. ("Hazmat suit, yeah/health *firrssst.*") On Feb. 2, the world tour for "Stumpwork," Dry Cleaning's expansive recent album, touches down at Pioneer Works.—*K. Leander Williams*

ON TELEVISION

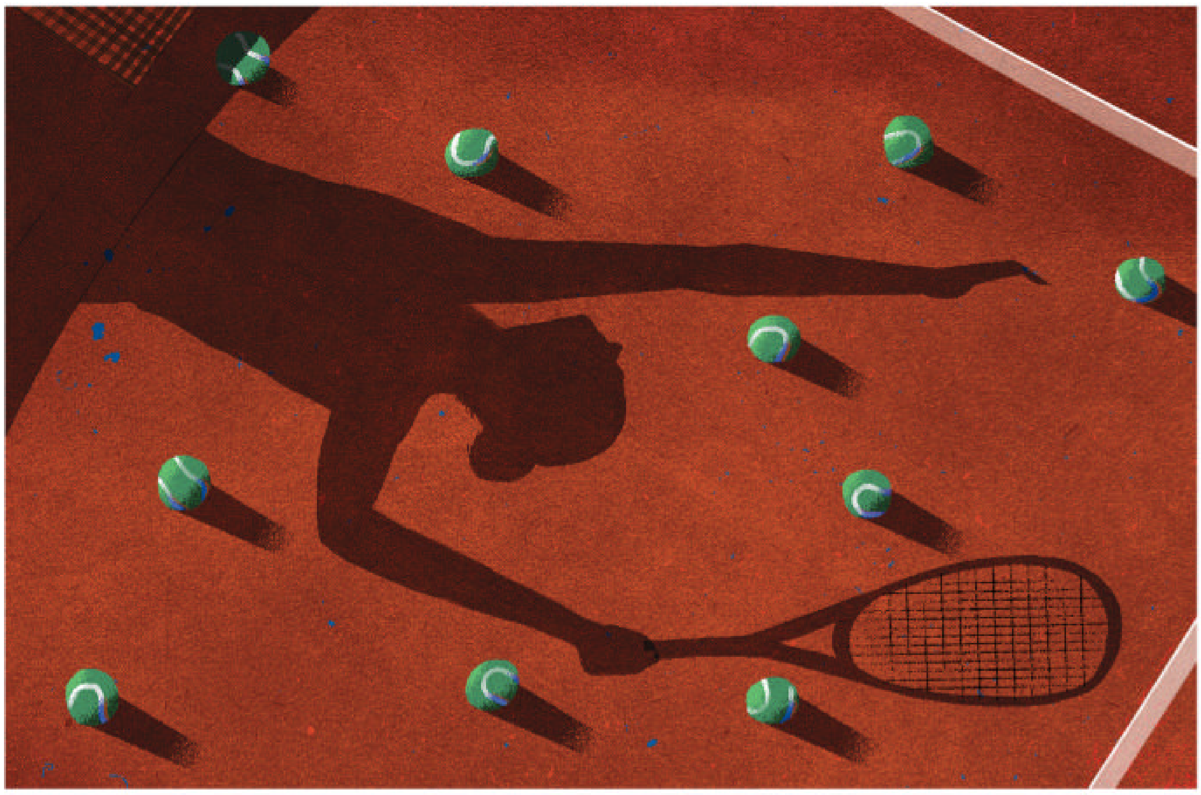


ILLUSTRATION BY RAJ DHUNNA

In 2019, Netflix débuted its first "sports docusoap," "F1: Drive to Survive," a reality show about Formula 1 racing. It became a phenomenon, mostly because Formula 1 drivers are natural stars—handsome, charismatic, competitive, bitchy, and in constant mortal peril. The behind-the-scenes drama also proved delicious; watching the team leaders Christian Horner and Toto Wolff verbally tear each other apart is almost more engrossing than the driving. Now the streamer transplants the format to the tennis world with the two-part documentary series **"Break Point."** (The first half aired this month; the second half arrives in June, around the time of the French Open.) The show follows up-and-coming tennis players, including Ons Jabeur, Taylor Fritz, and Félix Auger-Aliassime, as they fight for tournament wins and vie for Grand Slam titles. Despite plenty of behind-the-scenes access, it never quite reaches the giddy heights of its "F1" counterpart. Perhaps tennis is too patrician a game, with too much white linen and politesse for gum-snapping drama. "Break Point" likely won't make new tennis fans out of casual couch surfers, but it does provide an insider's glimpse into what the future of the sport might look like, and for devoted racket heads "Break Point" offers plenty to love.—*Rachel Syme*

Ballet, a post he begins in the fall. "Voices" returns to the repertory on a program that also includes a new work by the up-and-coming choreographer Keerati Jinakunwiphat, a dancer with A.I.M by Kyle Abraham, set to music by Du Yun.—*Marina Harss (David H. Koch; through Feb. 26.)*

Cullberg

This contemporary Swedish troupe, known until recently as Cullberg Ballet, was founded in 1967, but it is only now making its Joyce début. "Horse, the solos" is a product of the pandemic, created during lockdown by Cullberg dancers in Stockholm and the venerable, ever-questioning choreographer Deborah Hay in Texas. In the work, which premièred in a theatre without an audience, seven dancers act like soloists, stepping into and out of the light, finding their way into and through Hay's sparely simple or impossible suggestions.—*Brian Seibert (Joyce Theatre; Feb. 1-5.)*

"Memphis Jookin': The Show"

Lil Buck is by far the most famous practitioner of the gliding, pretzeling street dance form Memphis jookin'. But in this ninety-minute production he shares the spotlight with his peers, dramatizing through dance and dialogue a story about the form's lineage. Although Buck has earned prestige dancing to classical music, this show sticks to the Memphis underground rap style also called jookin', with Buck and a talented crew re-creating the innovation that blossomed in such sites as the Crystal Palace roller rink.—*B.S. (Rose Theatre; Feb. 2-3.)*

THE THEATRE

Memorial

"I want one memorial at the National Mall that is honest," the architecture student Maya Lin (played by Angel Lin, no relation) declares in Livian Yeh's drama, a world première presented by Pan Asian Repertory Theatre. She's defending her black-granite, non-figurative design for a Vietnam War monument against Colonel James Becker (James Patrick Nelson) and other veterans who consider it unpatriotic. Unfortunately for them, construction has begun and, as anyone familiar with the Mall knows, will be completed. Curiously, for a play touting honesty, Yeh and the director, Jeff Liu, omit significant historical details. (For one, many veterans shielded Lin from much of the political backlash, which came largely from the Reagan Administration.) The remaining story is pressed into a parable of art versus oppression, and the didacticism weighs on the performances. Only Sheryl Liu's set, which moves and opens in unexpected ways, approaches the subtle complexity of the play's subject.—*Dan Stahl (A.R.T./New York Theatres; through Feb. 19.)*

Modern Swimwear

What does the playwright Caitlin Saylor Stephens owe to Sylvie Cachay—a swimwear designer, killed by her boyfriend, Nicholas Brooks, in 2010 at Soho House in Manhattan—when turning the night of her murder into a play? Fictionalizing a real crime entails both moral and artistic hazards. In many respects, the production, directed by Meghan Finn, has taken scrupulous care: Christopher and Justin Swader's set is an impressive re-creation of a luxe Soho House hotel room, down to the tub design; the actors Fig Chilcott and Frank Zwally offer total commitment, she to playing impatience and vulnerability, he to playing a slime. But Stephens's fictional inventions—such as Sylvie's speech about the importance of staying hydrated, an ironic counterpoint to her eventual drowning—can be tasteless. Worse, the play also adds a strange conceit: that Nick was somehow psychically allergic to Sylvie's touch. (When the actors make contact, all the lights in the room buzz and flash.) Stephens clearly feels that Cachay's story can help us understand something about male violence—but the more she makes up, the less we learn.—*Helen Shaw (The Tank; through Feb. 12.)*

The Smuggler

Near the top of this terrific one-man, one-act play, Tim Finnegan—the main character among the half-dozen or so boldly conjured by Michael Mellamphy—speaks the word "American" in his heavy brogue, stressing the final syllable. That's symbolic, perhaps, of Tim's can-do attitude, but it's also a signal of the rhythms of speech soon to envelop the audience: Ronán Noone's dark comedy is composed entirely in rhymed couplets. The effect is double-edged, as Tim—an Irish immigrant and aspiring writer living hand to mouth with his wife and infant son, tending bar on Amity Island, off Cape Cod—speaks in a colloquial, working-class blend of Dublin and Boston, though his words are bathed in a formal structure that separates them from the mundane. The tale Tim tells is raw and raucous—part "Sopranos," part Archie Bunker—and Noone has plenty to say about immigration, the American caste system, and the American Dream. The director, Conor Bagley, is ably aided, in the Irish Rep's small, downstairs theatre, by Ann Beyersdorfer's fine scenic design, Michael O'Connor's lighting, and, especially, Liam Bellman-Sharpe's sound and music. Mellamphy is a dynamic presence, shifting easily among male and female roles and a variety of accents, while showing off some damn impressive cocktail-mixing moves.—*Ken Marks (Irish Rep; through Feb. 26.)*

ART

Andrea Fraser

This principled American performance artist—a superb parodist, whose focus is institutional critique—emerged in the late eighties, with incisive, dryly comic work. Fraser's first show in New York in thirteen years (she is based in L.A.) is a concise survey that includes documentation of her early museum tours, for which she first gained attention. In the 1991 video "Welcome to the Wadsworth," the artist appears as an imperious docent, whose lecture divulges disparities between the patrons of a museum and the residents of the Hartford, Connecticut, neighborhood where it is situated. In "Reporting from São Paulo, I'm from the United States," made in 1998, Fraser subverts the conventions of news journalism to reflect on the international art world's entangled relationship to neocolonialism and globalization. The exhibition concludes with a new piece, from last year, a Zoom-era epic titled "This meeting is being recorded," in which Fraser assumes the role of seven characters during the course of a single ninety-nine-minute shot, as unsettling contradictions come to a head. The dialogue is based on transcripts of a group of white women discussing such subjects as the Black Lives Matter paradigm shift. Fraser's virtuosic performance—too dispiriting and intimate to be funny—shares some lucid insights, but the piece is primarily a study in solipsism, privilege, and panic.—*Johanna Fateman (Marian Goodman; through Feb. 25.)*

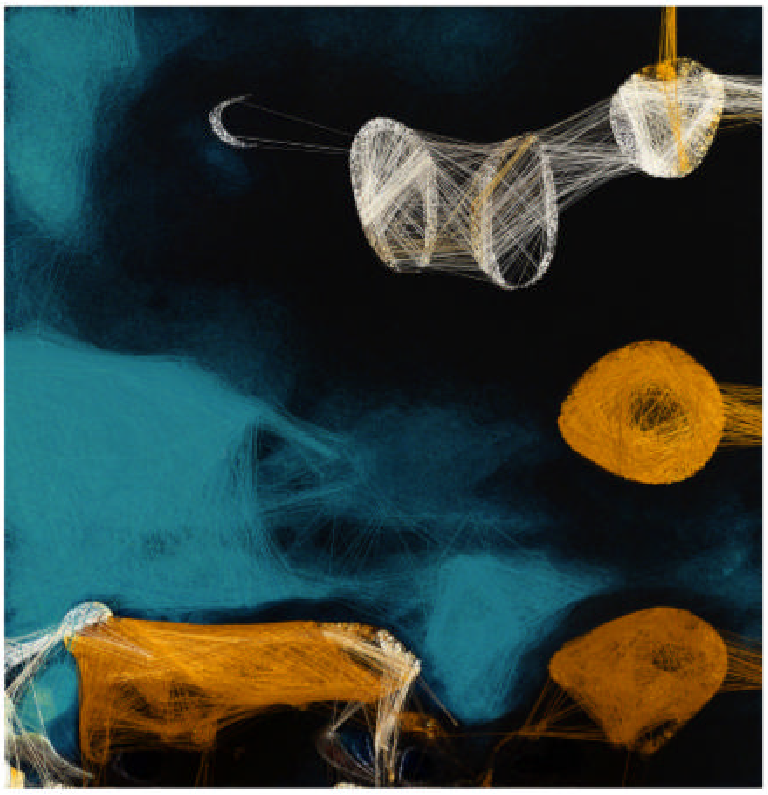
Rebecca Horn

In "Labyrinth of the Soul," a spellbinding, career-spanning exhibition of drawings by this daring German artist, who is in her late seventies, abstract marks appear at once notational and urgently expressive. Horn is perhaps best known for her performative "body-extension" works, which incorporate surreal sculptural appendages, such as the conical headpiece, intended to be worn by a nude woman, in "Einhorn (Unicorn)," conceived in 1970-71. These pieces have an explicit relationship to the body, as do Horn's later kinetic sculptures, which include machines that make drawings. But the hand-rendered works on paper—which range in height from nine inches to six feet—evoke movement (sometimes violent) and physical presence almost as acutely. Her early small drawings, from the nineteen-sixties, can feel schematic, reflecting an interest in anatomy and machinery; the pieces that followed reflect art-historical concerns and passions. The titles of a few large works, from 2014-15, nod to Francisco Goya. Frenzied spatters amass in a cloud near the top of the particularly magnetic "Goya, 31.12.2014," crisp rivulets dripping, like blood, to form a curtain of dark stripes. Given Horn's startling capacity to conjure supernatural menace, the Spanish Master's "Saturn Devouring His Son" comes to mind.—*J.F. (Sean Kelly; through Feb. 18.)*

"Lives of the Gods"

Per a Mayan myth, when the world began, in 3114 B.C., it took the gods three tries to get humans right. The first attempt, using mud, was a wash; wood didn't make the cut, either. Finally, corn hit the spot and people came into being. A few millennia later, Mayan artists paid homage to their makers by creating dazzling figures themselves, notably during the Classic period, between 250 and 900 A.D. (They also portrayed powerful mortals.) A hundred such works—in stone, painted ceramic, obsidian, jade, conch shell, and some (very rare) carvings in wood—are on view in this magnificent show at the Met. It presents a culture of enticing complexity, in which the immortals who conceived the sun, the moon, and the rain (to name some of the show's major themes) were fearsome but never invulnerable. One sandstone sculpture, from around 700 A.D., was made for the Centipede Kings, who ruled Tonina, a Mayan city in modern-day Chiapas, Mexico; it portrays Yax Ahk', a historical warrior, and a royal himself, who was captured as a prisoner of war and forced to impersonate a jaguar deity who had been burned to death. Happily, rebirth was possible, too: the dramatically installed exhibition includes several exquisitely modelled clay whistles in which tiny maize gods emerge from flowers, newborns in full ceremonial regalia.—*Andrea K. Scott (Metropolitan Museum of Art; through April 2.)*

IN THE MUSEUMS



© REFIK ANADOL STUDIO / COURTESY THE ARTIST / MOMA

One of the most crowd-pleasing—and controversial—exhibitions in New York City this winter is **"Refik Anadol: Unsupervised,"** a twenty-four-foot-square, constantly morphing abstraction, holding visitors rapt on the ground floor of MOMA, through March 5. Anadol, a Turkish-born, L.A.-based digital whiz (whose past partners include NASA), gets top billing, but he has a crucial collaborator: A.I. is generating the imagery, in real time, using as its data set tens of thousands of pictures of works in the museum's collection. Anadol has likened the process to painting with data, but don't look for hybrids of, say, a Jackson Pollock and "Starry Night." Instead, algorithms synthesize the archive into a hallucinatory primordial soup, served in three distinct formal styles. The most dramatic of these supplies cresting sloshes of rainbow-bright fluid with a disheartening amusement-park vibe. The other two modes—one distinguished by fine skeins of lines—are far subtler and offer the transfixing experience of watching an art work creating itself. Some of the critical backlash to the piece is driven by Anadol's involvement in N.F.T.s (a portion of the profits from an N.F.T. series based on "Unsupervised" benefits the museum), but there is also an element of the gatekeeping condescension that has dogged every form of machine-assisted art. Consider that color photography was dismissed as crassly commercial until 1976, when MOMA became the first major museum to mount a show. Artists have been teaming up with computers since the mid-fifties—for the genre once known as "new media," the spotlight is long overdue.—*Andrea K. Scott*

MOVIES

Digging for Fire

A Los Angeles couple's submerged tensions come to the surface in Joe Swanberg's tender, wildly imaginative comic drama, from 2015. A teacher named Tim (Jake Johnson), a yoga instructor named Lee (Rosemarie DeWitt), and their toddler son, Jude (Jude Swanberg, the director's son), take a staycation in a luxurious house belonging to one of Lee's clients. Scratching around on the hilly property, Tim unearths a gun and a human bone and wants to dig further. When Lee brings Jude to her mother's home and goes out with friends, Tim invites some guys over, and they bring some women with them, and everyone gets in on the excavation. The exuberantly crisscrossing story (co-written by Swanberg and Johnson) involves drugs, alcohol, fights, and flirtations; it captures the mixed emotions of marriage and parenthood, as conflicts between love and frustration, devotion and constraint, threaten to tear apart a well-matched pair. Refreshing life by considering death, renewing romance in the face of violence, Swanberg offers symbolic nods to film noir. The teeming and effervescent cast includes Brie Larson, Orlando Bloom, Anna Kendrick, Judith Light, and Sam Elliott.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on Tubi, Pluto, and other services.)*

Sandra

The vast yet stifling, luxurious yet menacing confines of a rural Italian villa provide the stagelike setting for this frenzied family drama by Luchino Visconti, from 1965. It's the story of a newlywed couple—a young heiress named Sandra (Claudia Cardinale) and her bluff American husband, Andrew (Michael Craig)—who met and married in Geneva. Visconti films their nuptial trip by sports car, from Switzerland to Sandra's estate in Volterra, with the kinetic thrill of a chase. Sandra, it turns out, is fleeing the past—into which she nonetheless leaps again, with tragic obsession. The couple had been doing research about Auschwitz, where Sandra's father, a Jewish scientist, was killed; she's heading home to attend a memorial ceremony for him. Then there's her brother, Gianni (Jean Sorel), an acerbic playboy with literary ambitions, who is writing a novel about brother-sister incest. With its howling winds and dark shadows, crashing zooms and sudden rages, Visconti's tale is, in effect, a work of gothic modernism; it's loosely based on the myth of Electra, and it links that story to the horrors of recent history.—*R.B. (Screening Feb. 6 and Feb. 10 at MOMA.)*

Suzanne, Suzanne

This medium-length documentary by Camille Billops and James V. Hatch, from 1982, is a multigenerational story focussed on the death of a man called Brownie. He was the father of Suzanne, the husband of Billie, and the son-in-law of Alma—and he was a domestic abuser. Suzanne, a recovering heroin addict, details the emotional and physical trauma of her childhood, which led to her drug use; Billie speaks of the liberation she felt after her husband's death. Along with the participants' frank and unsparing discussions, the filmmakers develop a distinctive, stylistically original, and practically effective framework of both image and staging in order to unleash pent-up words and emotions. One extraordinary sequence features a composition of Suzanne and Billie together, facing the camera, as Billie describes the horror of the beatings that her husband administered to Suzanne in a ritual that the family called "death row," and of the beatings that she herself endured. It's a scene of tragic confession and commiseration, of a newfound mutual understanding born of agonies disclosed on camera, amplified by simple but profound directorial imagination.—*R.B. (Screening Feb. 3-5 at BAM and streaming on the Criterion Channel.)*

You People

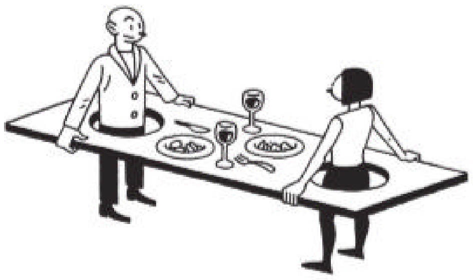
The first feature film directed by Kenya Barris, the creator of the TV show "black-ish," is a prickly comedy, written by Barris and Jonah Hill, set in Los Angeles. Hill, rattling off his funny lines, yet radiating such levels of discontent that he's almost painful to behold, plays Ezra, a Jewish guy who falls in love with a Black woman named Amira (Lauren London) and asks her to marry him. If their courtship is whisked through at top speed, it's because Barris is concerned not with romance but with its impediments: specifically, Ezra's parents (David Duchovny and Julia Louis-Dreyfus), who are keen—or desperately want to be keen—on the marriage, and Amira's parents (Eddie Murphy and Nia Long), who are not. Cue a rampage of embarrassments and faux pas, which tips into outright hostility, only to be pulled up short, for no visible reason, by the most panic-stricken of happy endings. The one person to emerge with credit from the melee is Murphy, whose character grows ever more rigid with anger. Supporting actors as forceful as Rhea Perlman and Elliott Gould barely get a chance to speak.—*Anthony Lane (In theatrical release and streaming on Netflix.)*

For more reviews, visit
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town

ON THE BIG SCREEN

The seemingly minor difficulties of everyday life get a major dramatic boost in Eric Gravel's second feature, **"Full Time,"** which opens Feb. 3. It's centered on Julie Roy (Laure Calamy), a divorced woman who lives with her two young children in a small French town and commutes by train to her job in Paris as the head chambermaid at a luxury hotel. But Julie's daily rush to get the kids to their babysitter, to catch her train, and to get to work on time is suddenly complicated by a series of strikes and protests that bring traffic and transit to a near-halt. Meanwhile, Julie's effort to get another job—a higher-paying one, in her original field of market research—puts her current one at risk, and her intricately interlocked complex of familial and professional demands is in danger of total collapse. Gravel displays, with grim fascination, the strict surveillance of the modern workplace and the desperate ruses by means of which workers cope. He lends the ramped-up tensions the urgency of a thriller, sketching a society that pits the struggling masses against one another, and that requires ruthlessness as the price of mere subsistence.—*Richard Brody*

COURTESY MUSIC BOX FILMS



PHOTOGRAPH BY MORGAN LEVY FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

TABLES FOR TWO

Lord's

506 LaGuardia Place

Last year, I grew so tired of beans that I did the unthinkable—cancelled my membership in the vaunted Rancho Gordo dried-bean club. The other evening at Lord's, a new restaurant in Greenwich Village, a bite of butter beans revived my interest with a jolt. Simmered in mushroom stock, each bean, firm yet silky, delivered a big hit of umami, on which toppings—roasted mixed mushrooms including maitakes and shiitakes, olive-oil-toasted bread crumbs—tripled down. The dish did not rely on nor trumpet the presence of truffle but, rather, harnessed its flavor in the service of complexity. Though the restaurant is ostensibly meat-themed, with an emphasis on offal, the bowl contained not a trace of animal product.

Lord's is the second restaurant from the chef Ed Szymanski, a Brit, and Patricia Howard, a Texan; the couple met while working at Angie Mar's now closed, very meat-centric Beatrice Inn. That their first place, Dame, a few blocks away, serves mostly seafood is an accident. Just before the pandemic, they started a pop-up intended to focus on the British tradition of fire-roasted meats. When COVID struck, they shifted to fish-and-chips, which proved easier to pass out a window. Szymanski's iteration, perhaps the best this city has ever seen, earned a passionate following; when the pair opened a full-service dining room, it made sense to build the menu around their big hit.

With Lord's, they're fulfilling their original vision. In an interview with Eater, Szymanski expressed eagerness to return to his "wheelhouse"—bloody steak, braised tripe, sweetbreads. But what I found most exciting were the dishes that seemed meant to balance out all that heaviness. In the low light of the dining room, I mistook a salad for a plate of thinly sliced salami; in fact, it was pale-pink ruffles of La Rosa del Veneto radicchio, coated in sesame seeds and fresh oregano, laid atop jewel-like morsels of Cara Cara orange and slippery slivers of salt-preserved peel, then showered with shaved Fiore Sardo, a smoked sheep's cheese, a combination of strong, competing flavors that somehow collaborated. A dish of venison tartare transported me to a forest on a crisp winter day, the cool, lean, finely chopped meat mixed with mustard seeds and rosemary oil, mounded over a slightly fudgy purée of sweet, earthy salsify, and finished with a tangle of mustard greens and crunchy salsify chips.

Seafood, theoretically marginal here, threatened to steal the show. Mandolined coins of celeriac were perched like a tiara on a globular cloud of celeriac mousse, beneath which hid plump coral cubes of hay-smoked trout, surrounded by a delicate moat of smoked-whitefish broth and glossy dill oil. The dynamite combination of clams and black pudding (blood sausage) married land and sea, the Christmas spices and iodine tang of the pudding and the briny sweetness of the clams knitted together with apple, onions, parsley, and a cider gastrique.

These dishes, for the most part, defied categorization. Anglophiles will be satisfied by the easy-to-classify Scotch egg (made, to great effect, with curried lamb instead of pork sausage), by the "proper English chips," tossed in beef tallow, and by the Welsh rarebit, adorned with anchovies and made with bread whose toasted edges, beneath melted Cheddar cheese and Worcestershire, were as caramelized and sticky as candy—though not as sweet as the Queen of Puddings, a layer of custard topped with raspberry jam and torched tufts of meringue. But I was disappointed, twice, by the very British savory pie of the day. Each of the fillings beneath the suet crust—chicken, bacon, and tarragon one night and ox cheek, carrot, and Stilton another—tasted like it could have used more time for the flavors to meld, and, though inflation confounds expectations, I was surprised by the pie's rather dainty size: at nearly forty dollars, it came across as a bit of a gimmick. The lesson seemed to be that nobody should put Szymanski in a box, least of all himself. *(Dishes $12-$44.)*

—Hannah Goldfield

THE NEW YORKER

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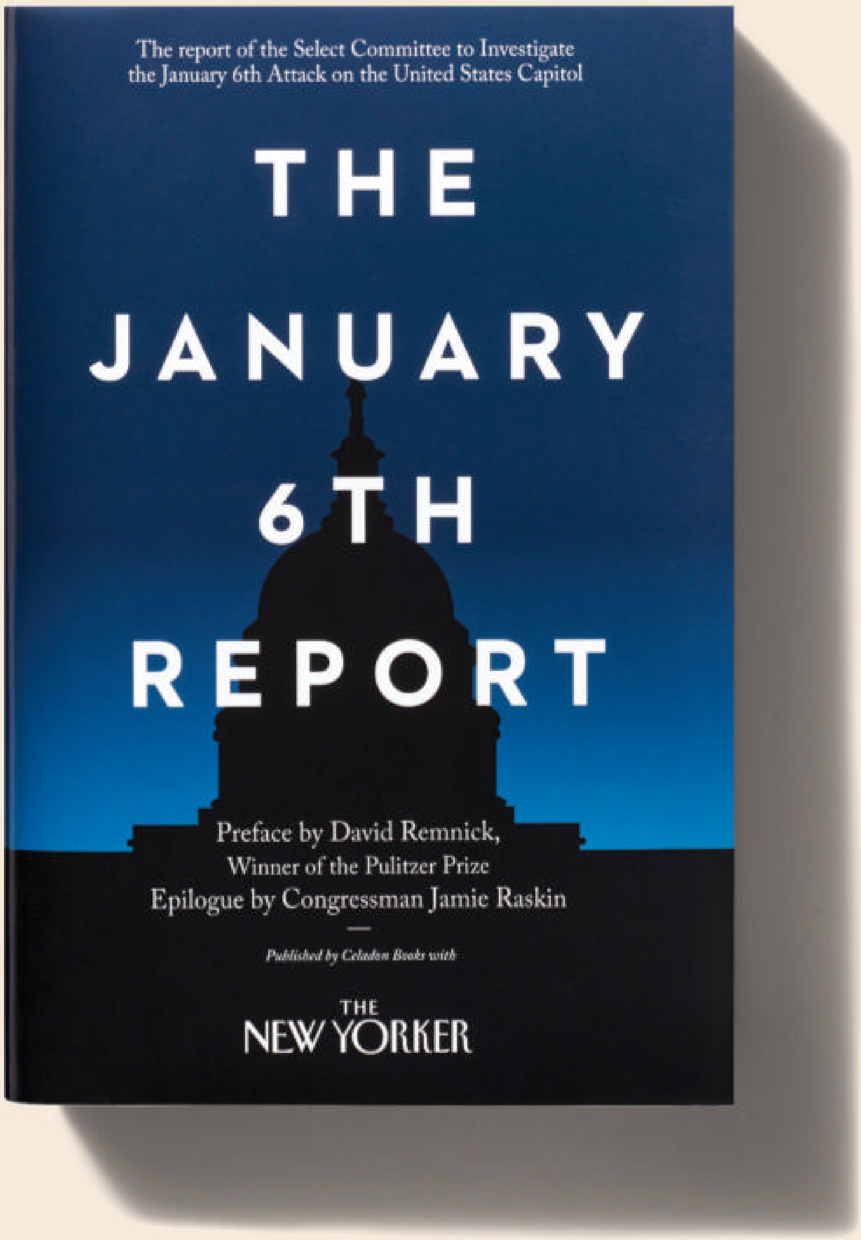
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HISTORIC BATTLES

The debacle surrounding the Florida Department of Education's recent rejection of an Advanced Placement course in African American studies is a reminder that battles over the past are almost always tied to efforts to win some war being waged in the present. The late-nineteenth-century romanticization of the Confederacy was meant to justify the new regime of segregation then being implemented across the South. That campaign was so successful that, in 1935, when W. E. B. Du Bois published "Black Reconstruction," his reconsideration of the period following the Civil War, he devoted an entire chapter to the ways in which the South had lost the war but won the historiography.

The road runs in both directions. The social movements of the nineteen-fifties and sixties spawned their own, generally corrective takes on the nation's past. The discipline of Black studies, which originated in the late sixties and is now more often referred to as Africana or African American studies, is a direct product of that wave of scholarly revisionism. Today, during a period in which states, particularly with Republican-led legislatures, have taken to removing books from libraries, stoking fears about critical race theory, and eviscerating diversity-equity-and-inclusion programs in schools—forty-two have proposed restrictive measures—it's scarcely surprising that a discipline built on an interest in exploring Black humanity would find itself in the crosshairs. That such a thing would happen in Florida is even less so.

Last year, Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican who is frequently mentioned as a 2024 Presidential contender, signed into law the Stop WOKE Act, a piece of Trumpist culture warfare that regulates how subject matter relating to race can be taught in public schools, picking up from where the right-wing crusade against Nikole Hannah-Jones's 1619 Project left off. (The State Board of Education had banned the teaching of critical race theory in public schools in 2021.) DeSantis also signed the "Don't Say Gay" bill, which limits discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity in public schools and became the centerpiece in a conflict over gay rights with Disney, one of the state's largest employers. (The Governor voiced concern, too, about the inclusion of "queer theory" in the A.P. course, saying last Monday, "When you try to use Black history to shoehorn in queer theory, you are clearly trying to use that for political purposes.") Both laws have been challenged in court, but together they show the demagogic lengths to which DeSantis is willing to go to burnish his profile among conservatives nationally.

DeSantis shared some of his own ideas about the nation's past during a gubernatorial-campaign debate last fall, stating that "it's not true" that "the United States was built on stolen land." That claim, of course, is starkly at odds not only with the history of westward expansion but with the history of Florida; thousands of Native Americans were forcibly relocated from the region, with the Indian Removal Act of 1830. In general, the Governor's objective is seemingly to provide white Floridians, from a young age, with a version of the past that they can be comfortable with, regardless of whether it's true.

The A.P. course is being piloted in sixty high schools across the country, including at least one in Florida, and is scheduled to be available to any schools that offer A.P. courses in the 2024-25 school year. There appear to have been few problems with teaching it, even in Florida, but on January 12th the state's education department sent a letter to the College Board, which oversees the creation and implementation of A.P. courses, notifying it that the curriculum is "inexplicably contrary to Florida law and significantly lacks educational value." On January 20th, Manny Diaz, Jr., the commissioner of education, tweeted, "We proudly require the teaching of African American history. We do not

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

accept woke indoctrination masquerading as education." He cited the course's references to notable academics, including Robin D. G. Kelley, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and the late bell hooks, as supposed examples of such indoctrination.

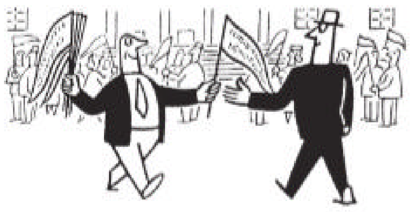
A day earlier, the College Board had released a statement saying that the course was still in draft form, and that "frameworks often change significantly" during the revision process. But the official framework of the course is scheduled to be released to the public on February 1st, the first day of Black History Month. The course guide for instructors, which runs to two hundred and forty-six pages, states in its preface that A.P. "opposes indoctrination" and that courses are built around an "unflinching encounter with evidence" and empirical analysis. It's an odd note to direct at teachers of high-school students who have displayed the intellectual and emotional maturity to engage with college-level coursework. However, it's likely intended not for them but for any bureaucrats and politicians who believe that "wokeism"—a threadbare slang term for social awareness—is an actual ideology.

Of all the criticisms aimed at the course, the most questionable is the department's contention that it "lacks educational value." The course includes contributions from some of the most highly regarded academics in the field, including the literary scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and the historians Nell Irvin Painter and Annette Gordon-Reed. Faculty from Harvard, Emory, Georgetown, the University of California, and the University of Connecticut are on an advisory board. With that contention, the department is, in effect, dismissing the import of Frederick Douglass's autobiography "My Bondage and My Freedom," excerpts of which are included in the curriculum; the Dred Scott decision, also excerpted; and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, whose origins are explored in detail. In fact, the idea that the subject matter covered in the course does not warrant a place in the classroom is contradicted by Florida's own educational standards. Among the topics examined are the transatlantic slave trade, the roots of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the birth of the civil-rights movement, some of which students are taught as early as the fourth grade.

Last Wednesday, three Florida high school students, represented by the civil-rights attorney Benjamin Crump, said that they were prepared to sue the DeSantis administration if the ban on the course is not lifted. But there is little likelihood that the course can be revised in such a way that it is palatable to DeSantis and the state's education department without losing the essence of what it is attempting to convey about the miasma of race in American history. Their sense appears to be that the evils of the past are not nearly as dangerous now as the willingness to talk about them in the present.

—*Jelani Cobb*

WIND ON CAPITOL HILL
ONCE UPON A TIME

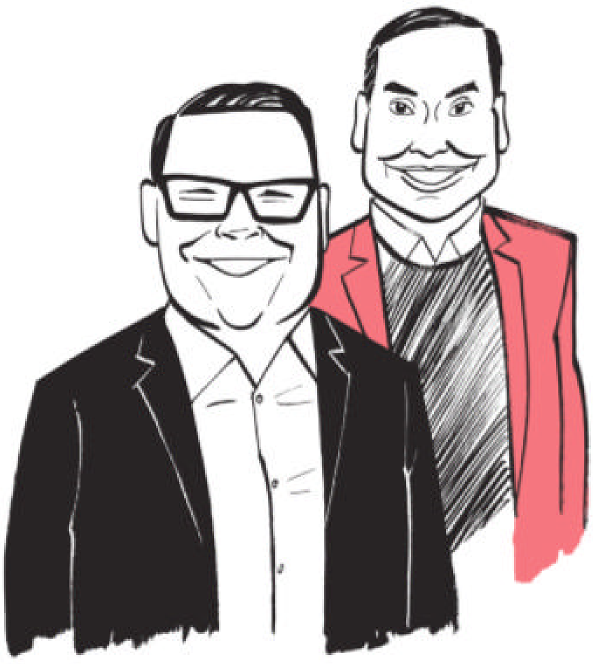


The thing that's hardest to believe about George Santos, the congressman from Long Island who claimed falsely, or without evidence, that he worked for Goldman Sachs and Citigroup, that he was the target of an assassination attempt, that he starred, and "slayed," on the Baruch College volleyball team, that he was Jewish ("I said I was Jew-*ish*," he later clarified), that his grandparents survived the Holocaust, that his mother died in the September 11th attacks, that four of his employees were killed in the Pulse night-club shooting, that he had his shoes stolen off his feet on Fifth Avenue, and that an alter ego of his had a role on the show "Hannah Montana," and who has been accused of swindling three thousand dollars from a homeless Navy veteran with a dying dog, of working for a company running a Ponzi scheme, and of performing in Brazil as a drag queen named Kitara ("Sue me for having a life"), and whom the Republican senator John Kennedy recently called a "bunny boiler" ("I don't know if you've seen 'Fatal Attraction,' but there are people like that out there," Kennedy said), is that he actually won election. Horrifying? Yes. Distressing? Sure. But, in a game-recognize-game kind of way, isn't it also a little bit impressive?

"I like to win the things that people say you can't," Chris Grant said the other day. Grant is the forty-two-year-old founder of Big Dog Strategies, the consultancy that led Santos to victory after his previous consultants quit. Big Dog ("I'm six-six, three hundred whatever," Grant explained) did work for more than a hundred Republican campaigns in 2022 and was the lead adviser for eight. Grant agreed to supply some tips on the art of pulling off wins in difficult races.

Big Dog had candidates with worse odds than Santos. Upstate, Nick Langworthy defeated Carl Paladino after being down by some thirty points. What's the secret? "A non-stop focus on the issues and an obsession with data," Grant said.

But every campaign is different. In 2018, Big Dog had Steve Watkins trumpet his biography in a Kansas congressional race. "The primary was a long shot," Grant said. "As has been well documented, he didn't have deep ties to the district." (Watkins was later charged with voter fraud for listing a UPS store as his address.) "But he did have a compelling military story. That was a strong play for him." In the general, it emerged that Watkins, like a less imaginative Santos, had fabricated some of his bio, including a story about how he had pro-



Chris Grant and George Santos

vided heroic aid to climbers during an earthquake on Mt. Everest. But by then he'd already pivoted to the issues. He won by a point.

When hiring, Grant is picky about résumés. He has one rule: applicants must have prior experience in blue-collar or service jobs. (Santos's embellished C.V. wouldn't make the cut, but his real one would: he used to work in a call center for Dish Network.)

Grant, who grew up outside of Buffalo and wears Clark Kent-style glasses, always wanted to be a political operative. "I read a *Scholastic News* magazine in third grade about George H. W. Bush, and I decided that I was a Republican because he wouldn't raise my taxes," he said. Grant was a junior in college during the 2000 Presidential election. He explained, "There are guys in the business that you look up to. Karl Rove was the guy." To stay sharp, he reads five or so books at a time: "One of the best books I've read in the last ten years was 'Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World.' Short of the murdering of people, he had an interesting way of building things."

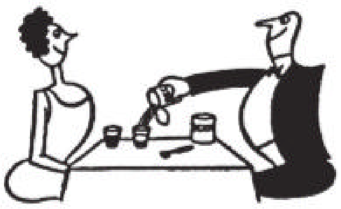
Grant thinks that people have a distorted view of what political operatives do. " 'House of Cards' is what we wish it was," he said. " 'Veep' is what it is." The *Times*' chief fashion critic recently saw calculating menace in Santos's wardrobe. "He just looked so darn convincing," she wrote, of his quarter-zips worn beneath blazers. Grant said that operatives' aesthetic advice was rarely so advanced. "We have to tell some people basic things: take a shower, brush your teeth, comb your hair."

How would Big Dog counsel other celebrities in media storms? "My advice to Prince Harry would be to shut up," Grant said. Would he advise Harry to attend the Coronation? "If you have any basic human decency, if your father's going to be sworn in as a monarch, I would think you'd be supportive. But I'm not a monarch!" What about Will Smith? "Don't slap people?" he said.

As for Joe Biden and his classified-documents scandal, Grant said that the President had already made a big mistake. "If you're a President, never encourage the appointment of a special prosecutor," he said. But he wasn't surprised by the decision. "The first hint of problems, Democrats cut bait," he said. "I couldn't imagine being a successful operative in the Democratic Party, for a host of reasons. Republicans don't have the advantage of a sympathetic press, so we are much more battle tested. If I had a communications problem, I'd hire a Republican."

—*Zach Helfand*

THE BOARDS
ONE MAN'S MEAT



"They all deserve to die," Sweeney Todd cries out, razor held high. "Even you, Mrs. Lovett, even I." The M.O. follows: he'll cut the throats of his customers while he's shaving them. Mrs. Lovett knows that the quickest way to love is a shared interest: Why not donate the corpses to her meat-pie shop? Jig of joy.

Now Josh Groban and Annaleigh Ashford, the stars of the new "Sweeney Todd"—the third revival of a Stephen Sondheim musical heading for Broadway since his death, in 2021—were having dinner at Tea & Sympathy, in Greenwich Village. They sat in a street shed, to minimize COVID risk, a miniature red telephone booth behind them. Day two of rehearsals was done.

Ashford had just met her dialect coach and was enjoying trying out the Cockney she'd need for her part. "Don't you know that times is haahd, sir?" she Cockneyed. "The mouth is very *rowwnd*," she explained, in character. "Everything is very *fowaahd*. The mouth is like an 'o' and very *slahck jaawed*." She said that she trained by watching "The Great British Bake Off," especially the subtitled contestants.

Groban said that he was happy to be onstage without a fat suit, which he'd worn in "Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812." "I'm not doing that for this one," he said. He and "Sweeney Todd"'s director, Thomas Kail, had begun rehearsing his hardest song, "Epiphany," and he had a barbering lesson coming up. Groban wore round clear-framed glasses, which, with his scruffy facial hair and white cotton sweater, made him look less like a misanthropic murderer and more like the pop ambassador he'd been before "The Great Comet" gave him street cred (and a Tony nomination).

The waiter arrived. Ah, English meat pies! Problem: Groban, from L.A., is a pescatarian. And he wasn't hungry. Ashford was all in. She bragged that she'd grown up on venison Hamburger Helper, in Colorado. Lamb pie for her. As in the show, she supplies the mettle when her co-conspirator falters. She urged Groban to get the tweed kettle pie, and he agreed. But Ashford, it turned out, had a problem, too. "I have a gluten allergy, so I can only have the G.F. one," she said. Luckily, Tea & Sympathy did gluten-free lamb pie.

Talk turned to their rehearsal schedule, which was intense—previews begin February 26th—and had changed, Ashford explained, after she opted not to go on a publicity trip to London for Hulu's "Welcome to Chippendales." (She plays the accountant wife of the club's founder.)

"So it was my fault," Ashford acknowledged. Whoops, that's from a different Sondheim musical! "It was *myyy* fault," she sang. She and her son, who is six, had just seen "Into the Woods," his first Broadway musical. The giant hadn't scared him—a good sign. (Ashford wore a white shirt featuring Disney characters, swag from a recent trip with her son to Disneyland.) A fire engine clanged up Eighth Avenue. Ashford said that all she'd ever wanted was to be a New Yorker.

Groban and Ashford told their Sondheim stories. For each of them, singing the master began with a setback. At fourteen, Groban auditioned for "Sweeney Todd" at Interlochen and wound up in the chorus: "I was killed in the first five minutes of the show, hanged by Judge Turpin." At eleven, Ashford tried out for, and did not get, the part of Little Red in "Into the Woods" at an arts center near her home. Her taste already ran to precocious, given that she loved the

Sondheim of songs like "Losing My Mind," from "Follies."

Groban saw himself in that show brat, too: "I couldn't wait to be old enough to be—"

Ashford: "Elaine Stritch."

Groban: "—singing these songs!"

All-good-things-come-to-those-who-can-wait outcome: years later, Ashford went on to play the muse Dot on Broadway, opposite Jake Gyllenhaal, in 2017, and Groban was now sharpening his razors.

Back to pies. Groban poured HP sauce on his—a mix of cod and salmon in white cream. His thoughts seemed to wander as he spooned up his meal. "They say our meat is kind of similar to pork," he said.

Silence.

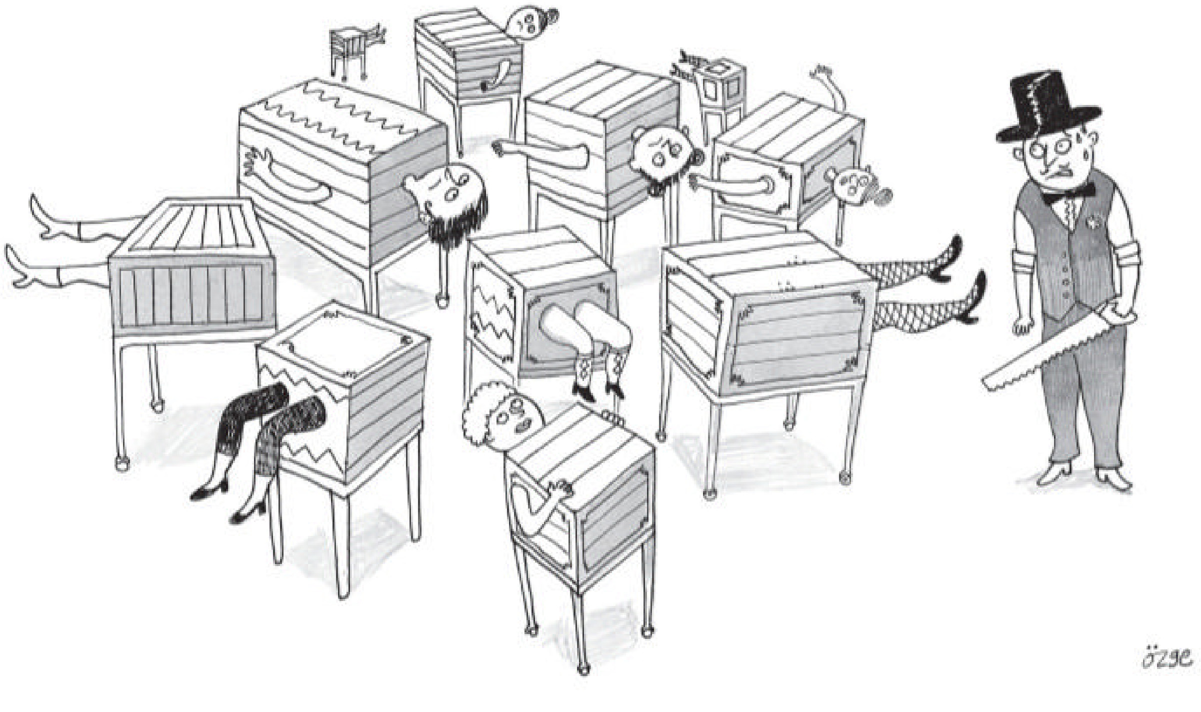
Ashford looked down at hers, only half eaten. Again game, she pointed out that when she was a kid her dad would take her to the Fort and to the Buckhorn Exchange, two Denver-area red-meat redoubts. "Literally," she boasted, "I've had antelope. I've had ostrich. I've had alligator. I've had crocodile."

Groban allowed that he could possibly be persuaded to eat meat, but only if "a bow and arrow were involved in getting it on the plate."

"Yeah!" Ashford agreed, but then admitted that she'd never actually shot an animal, and never could.

Groban was relieved. "We'd scare away the coyotes with the pots and pans in the hills of L.A.," he said.

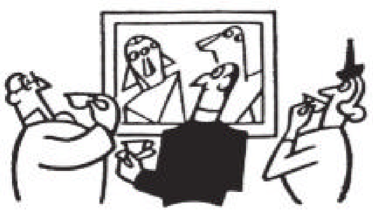
—D. T. Max



"Why do I always overcommit?"

GLORIOUS FOOD

TRANSATLANTIC



Ruthie Rogers, the co-founder of the River Café, one of London's most beloved restaurants, looked down at her feet and asked, "Do you think I should put my shoes on?" She was at the East Side apartment of a friend, the architectural historian Victoria Newhouse, who was hosting a party in Rogers's honor that was about to begin. Rogers, who is in her early seventies and wears her strawberry-blond hair in bangs, said, "Every photograph of me as a child, dressed up at weddings and everything, I'm never wearing shoes." It was just as well: some of the pieces in Newhouse's considerable art collection live on the floor, including a reflective metallic sculpture by Anish Kapoor and a horse head suspended in formaldehyde by Damien Hirst.

The occasion was the release of "The River Cafe Look Book: Recipes for Kids of All Ages," the thirteenth title that Rogers has published since 1995. "We thought about doing a children's book, to inspire kids, and then we were bored doing a children's book," she said. "And then we tried doing step by step and we were bored." Finally, she found inspiration in a slim volume that her daughter-in-law sent after Rogers's husband, the British architect Richard Rogers, suffered a traumatic brain injury as a result of a fall. (He died two years later, in 2021.) The book, devised by a Dutch neurologist, pairs photographs that somehow echo each other, as a way to stimulate injured and neurodivergent brains.

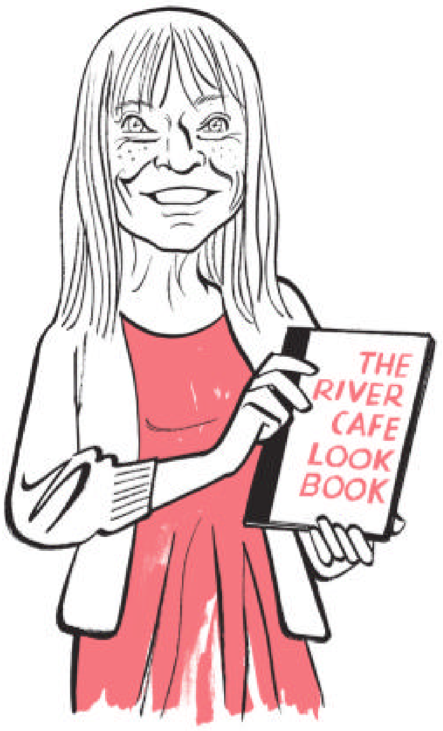
It occurred to Rogers that the concept might appeal to kids. Before the "Look Book" recipes, and after a dedication to Richard, fifty sets of photographs each match a dish with an image by the photographer Matthew Donaldson: a pile of mashed potatoes and green beans opposite a vase of yellow tulips; a loaf of focaccia next to a tote bag that has been flattened by tires on a pebbled road; a Pavlova, layered with stiff meringue and whipped cream, beside a marble bust.

"There's a man who came to the party in London and said, 'I'm in your book!'" Rogers recalled. She flipped to an image of the back of someone's head—red hair combed smoothly to the nape of his neck—paired with a plate of ovoid chocolate truffles. The photo had narrowly made the final cut. "Somehow, putting hair in a cookbook was a little worrying," she said.

As guests gazed at Newhouse's paintings (Picasso, Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon), one brought up a party past: "Victoria, do you remember when you threw a tea party for Ruby Rogers? There were a handful of three-year-olds and you had chocolate cupcakes, and the parents were terrified that the kids with their chocolate hands would run into the paintings. So we ate all the chocolate cupcakes because we wanted them to be gone!"

Customers flock to River Café for its seasonal Italian food and its sleek, architectural dining room. It's also known for Rogers's ability to make anyone feel like he or she is the most important person in the room, civilians and celebrities alike. (Rogers has a podcast called "Ruthie's Table 4," and at the start of each episode she gushes over one of her many A-list regulars—Paul McCartney, Gwyneth Paltrow, David Beckham, Nancy Pelosi—before asking the person to read a recipe from one of her books.) Born and raised in the Catskills, she speaks with a transatlantic accent.

Standing in Newhouse's foyer, Rogers received every guest personally, introducing herself to strangers and greet-


THE RIVER CAFE LOOK BOOK

Ruthie Rogers

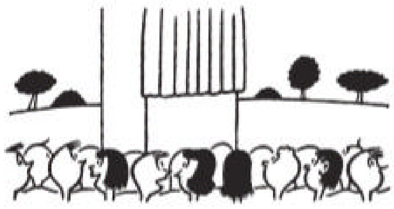
ing old friends from London and New York—architects and art dealers, writers and publicists—with a breathless "Hi, I love you."

One guest, a documentary-film director from Lithuania, said that she had eaten at the River Café years ago. Rogers urged her to return. When it comes to community institutions, like schools and museums, "I put restaurants at the bottom," she said. "But, when COVID ended, people were so emotional about restaurants."

Earlier that day, Rogers had been to Balthazar. A woman had approached her, raving about the River Café. "And then she left, and the manager said, 'That was an actor we hired. Keith McNally'"—Balthazar's owner—" 'wanted you to feel *really* welcome.' And I believed her! I said, 'Wow, I never thought of *that!* I thought I welcomed people really well to River Café.'"

—*Hannah Goldfield*

ATLANTA POSTCARD
COP CITY



A dozen preschoolers arrived at the Highlander School, in East Atlanta, on a recent morning. Situated near a few gentrifying neighborhoods and a highway, the school offers what it calls "anti-bias and anti-racist, nature-centered" learning, for thirteen hundred dollars a month. Its four classrooms have a progressive-eclectic aesthetic: squiggly portraits of Martin Luther King, Jr., beside displays of alternative currencies (shells) and children's books about activism ("The Art of Protest"). Also, lots of plants.

Seven three-year-olds plopped down in Toddler Two Living Room. A teacher led them through some yoga poses and a Spanish nursery rhyme, then another teacher introduced the topic of the day.

"What's going on in Weelaunee Forest?" she said.

"Trees," someone said. "They're cutting down the trees."

The teacher asked the toddlers why. "Because they want to make Cop City," a girl in a pink dress answered.

"And do we want Cop City to go there?"

"No," the children called out in unison.

Why? " 'Cause they want to cut down the trees," a girl with glasses said.

And what was wrong with that? "Because we need the trees."

"To give us air," someone else added. And "animals," a boy named Clark said.

The school is a few miles from the South River Forest, which the Muscogee Creek people called the Weelaunee before their forced removal, in the early eighteen-hundreds. In 2021, the city of Atlanta announced that it would build a "public safety training facility" in the woods, with a firing range and a mock village. Activists took to the trees to protest what they've dubbed Cop City. About twenty have been arrested, on charges of domestic terrorism. In mid-January, Manuel Teran, a forest defender who went by Tortuguita, or Little Turtle, was killed by a Georgia state trooper during an encampment eviction. There's no body-camera footage of the incident, according to a spokesman for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, who claims that Teran shot at the trooper first.

"I don't believe it," Rukia Rogers, the founder of the Highlander School, told a visitor while the kids were at recess. Rogers knew Teran; they gave her a massage on her birthday last year. "I remember Manuel leaning into me in this wellness tent in the woods," she said. "I was in a bad place. They were the most beautiful soul. Totally chill. I never knew them to carry a gun." She went on, "We talked a lot about the forest. They were committed to staying."

Rogers has taken her students to anti-Cop City rallies, which they've helped advertise with hand-drawn signs. "We've gotten trolled online," she said. "People saying we shouldn't be there." (Late last week, Governor Brian Kemp declared a state of emergency, "due to unlawful assemblage, overt threats of violence, disruption of the peace, and danger existing to persons and property," and activated the National Guard.) They've also taken monthly trips to the forest. "We went to a Muscogee stomp," Rogers said. "We planted seeds, took tours with tree defenders—they showed how they got into the tree houses. Then we told the students there was a plan to destroy it. At twelve o'clock, they were, like, 'I'm ready to sleep.'" She laughed. "They're not necessarily abolitionists yet, but when they saw the bulldozers they started talking about building a shield."

Rogers was still figuring out how to explain Teran's death. "Nothing is off limits here," she said.

Clark and another toddler named Lassiter went into a smaller room with Rogers, followed by a crew working on a documentary about the forest. "Remember the video we shared of the bulldozers," Rogers said, "and what happened to the Weelaunee Forest?"

"They cut down the trees," Lassiter said, fidgeting.

Rogers nodded. "How did that make you feel, Clark?"

"Sad," he said.

"And mad," Lassiter added.

"It's O.K. to be mad," Rogers said. She handed them a few small wooden trees and some blocks decorated with pictures of the students. The children arranged them on a table.

Rogers asked what they thought about planting a pear tree in the forest.

"And strawberries," Lassiter said.

"What would we do if the people came to take them down again?" Rogers asked.

"We could give them power," Clark said.

"Super-super-trees," Lassiter added.

Pretty soon, they'd built a miniature forest protected by the anthropomorphized wooden blocks. Clark added a giant tower made from wooden spools. "I'm powerful," he said, admiring his work. Then, after a snack, he took a nap.

—*Charles Bethea*

A REPORTER AT LARGE

STOPPING THE VIOLENCE

Amid a murder crisis, law enforcement isn't enough. What else works?

BY ALEC MACGILLIS

Corey Winfield was ten when he saw someone get shot for the first time. He and a friend were marching around with a drum in the Park Heights section of Northwest Baltimore, and a few older guys asked if they could use it; while they were doing so, someone came up and shot one of them in the back, paralyzing him. At eleven, Corey found his first gun, in an alley near his school. He sold it to a friend's older brother for forty-five dollars and used the money to buy lots of penny candy. At thirteen, he saw someone get killed for the first time—a friend, who was fourteen—and that year he started selling drugs. After he was robbed a few times, he bought another gun. When he was seventeen, he was buying some drugs to sell when the dealers tried to rob him, so he shot one of them, killing him.

Winfield went to prison for nearly twenty years. Two weeks after his release, in 2006, his younger brother, Jujuan, who was twenty-one, was shot to death outside the family's house. For days, Winfield stalked the man he suspected of the murder; he might have killed him, but a police cruiser appeared as he was about to shoot. He went home, where he found his aunt Ruth, who had brought him up, sitting alone in the dark. She told him that she knew what he was up to. "Please stop, I don't want to lose another baby," she said to him. "I broke down and we cried on the sofa," Winfield told me.

Winfield promised to give up guns, and soon he committed to getting others to stop shooting, too. Baltimore was building a "violence interrupter" program, modelled on one launched in Chicago, in which people who have criminal records and a history of street violence use their contacts and credibility to defuse tensions before anyone is shot. Winfield became one of the first outreach workers in the new program, Safe Streets, citing his willingness to eschew vengeance as proof that peace was possible. Jujuan's death "opened my eyes up to the pain I was causing, and had been causing for half my life," he told me. "I was part of the mayhem and the destruction." Soon after he joined, he helped a nineteen-year-old who wanted to stop selling drugs procure a copy of his birth certificate, so that he could get regular work. When the young man finally got the document, he started crying. "All my life, they told me my father didn't know who I was," he said. "But he signed my birth certificate, and that's gotta mean he loved me."

Many other cities also began adopting the interrupter model. It had intuitive appeal as a complement to policing: why not deploy people with neighborhood know-how and the motivation to redeem themselves? "There's so many things that we could do and should be doing, outside of law enforcement, before things get to the point of needing to utilize the criminal-justice system," Monique Williams, a public-health researcher who until recently led Louisville's Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods, said.

There was resistance from police departments: the interrupters generally avoided coöperating with the cops, and some officers were wary of men whom

SITE DIREC
STREETS
BROOKLYN

"Police don't mean a damn thing when somebody is coming to get killed," Corey Winfield, a violence interrupter, said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAHIM FORTUNE

they had arrested not so long ago. Some interrupters lapsed into drug dealing or other illegal activity. In Louisville, the Metro Council stopped funding the city's three interrupter teams in 2019, after an interrupter was arrested for dealing methamphetamine (the charges were later dropped) and another worker was charged with raping a woman. (He was convicted of a related felony.) "There was not a lot of believing in the product from the Metro Council," the leader of one team, Eddie Woods, told me. "So any excuse is a good excuse to pull the plug on it."

In 2020, everything changed. Violence spiked across the country, with homicides rising by thirty per cent, wiping out two decades of progress. Criminologists attributed the rise to a combination of the social disruption caused by the pandemic and the deterioration of police-community relations after the murder of George Floyd, in Minneapolis, which led to less proactive policing and less coöperation from residents. After the Presidential election, Joe Biden's Administration looked for ways to stem the violence without relying solely on traditional law enforcement, which had come under intense scrutiny on the left. In 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which included funding that many cities are spending on "community violence intervention," the catch-all term for non-police approaches to reducing violent crime. In addition to interrupters, these measures include programs that detach young men from gangs, those which meet with shooting victims in hospitals to deter retaliation, and those which offer young men employment and counselling in cognitive-behavioral therapy.

For years, these programs competed with one another for whatever scarce funding was available, passing from one short-lived pilot project to another. Now they are being showered with unprecedented resources: Louisville is getting twenty-four million dollars; Baltimore will receive fifty million dollars.

The funding has created an opportunity for community violence intervention to become a significant feature of the public-safety landscape. But the challenges are still immense. The programs have only a few years to prove that they deserve lasting support after the federal money runs out. Public-safety agencies that until recently consisted of a handful of people are having to expand rapidly to oversee millions in spending, building a new civic infrastructure in a matter of months. And the evidence for how well some of the programs work is mixed and sometimes elusive, not least because it's hard to measure crimes that never happen. "The money creates a problem," Eddie Woods said. "Everybody's an intervention specialist now."

Gary Slutkin, an epidemiologist, spent seven years in the late nineteen-eighties and early nineties at the World Health Organization, working to contain the H.I.V.-AIDS epidemic in Central and East Africa. He had previously fought cholera in Somalia and a tuberculosis outbreak in San Francisco. When he returned to the United States, in 1995, he went to Chicago, to be near his parents. Deciding which cause to take on next, he settled on one of the leading drivers of mortality in the city: violence.

Chicago had about nine hundred homicides per year, and Slutkin found the debates about causes and solutions deeply unsatisfying. "I just began to ask people what they were doing about it, and nothing made sense to me," he said. "It made no scientific sense. It had no logic. There was no theory other than 'Bad people.'" As he saw it, gun violence was an epidemic not unlike the diseases he had spent his career fighting. "It qualifies as a contagious disease, as it has characteristic signs and symptoms causing morbidity and mortality, and it's contagious, as one event leads to another," he told me.

Slutkin believed that it needed to be treated as an epidemic, by using public-health workers to reach those who were most infectious and susceptible. Those workers should be people who "have credibility and access to the population that you need to talk to," he said. In Chicago, that entailed recruiting men with criminal histories to serve as outreach workers in neighborhoods experiencing high rates of violence.

In 2000, with the University of Illinois Chicago as his institutional base and initial funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Slutkin deployed a team of eight workers in West Garfield Park, one of the most violent neighborhoods in the city. Shootings there declined by sixty-eight per cent. Slutkin added teams in six more areas in the next couple of years, and within a year shootings in those areas decreased an average of thirty per cent.

It was an impressive result, but homicide rates were falling all over the country, and other models of violence reduction were also seeing success. One was the "focussed deterrence" model, pioneered by David Kennedy, in Boston, which included group interventions, wherein teams of prosecutors, police officers, and respected community figures met with young men deemed most likely to commit violent crimes and offered them social services, coupled with the threat of consequences if they engaged in further violence.

But Slutkin's model—eventually called Cure Violence—got enough credit for reduced shootings that other cities began deploying interrupters, often hiring Cure Violence to train and guide them. Many city governments were leery of hiring people with serious criminal records, and the programs were often run by non-profit groups that had looser restrictions.

When Baltimore launched Safe Streets, in 2007, its homicide rate was among the highest in the country. Dante Barksdale, a charismatic native of East Baltimore in his early thirties, helped lead the effort almost from the start. "I was tired of getting locked up, of getting robbed by police, of having to keep an eye out at all times," Barksdale later wrote of his attraction to the program. "I wanted a regular job. And it seemed the universe had one in mind for me. My reputation as a hustler would help the Safe Streets mission more than any amount of training could."

Safe Streets put its first team in McElderry Park, on the east side. Barksdale, who was better known by his nickname, Tater, became a champion for the program as it expanded into three more neighborhoods in the next few years, a period during which homicides began falling sharply in Baltimore for the first time in decades. He joined Cure Violence staff from Chicago for training sessions around the country. Cobe Williams, Cure Violence's training director, would drive around the Chicago housing projects with Barksdale. "That's my guy," Williams told people. "He is so committed to stopping the violence."

Like many interrupters, Corey Winfield found it hard to avoid sliding back into illegal activity. By 2011, he was selling drugs on the side to supplement his Safe Streets wage, thirteen dollars an hour, with which he was supporting two daughters. His aunt Ruth chided him. Winfield told me, "She said, 'Listen, you're doing God's work. You can't do God's work and still do the Devil's work. God's going to punish you.'" Two months later, he was arrested after giving a ride to a friend who was on the way to a robbery, and sentenced to five years' probation.

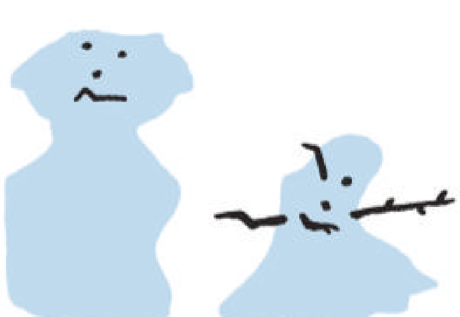
Winfield found it challenging to strike the balance demanded of a "credible messenger"—using the reputation gained from past brushes with the law to earn the trust of those who were still entrenched in the streets while avoiding such behavior himself. Sometimes, he told me, he was ostracized by friends who saw him wearing an orange Safe Streets T-shirt. "When I first put this shirt on, the whole city knew, and it was hard, but I didn't take it off," he said. "I would go up, like, 'Yo, what's up,' and you walk away. I'm usually in, but now you all walk away, you leave. It's hard on me."

Winfield left the program for a few years, and worked with an organization that served runaway youths. Then, in April, 2015, a twenty-five-year-old man from West Baltimore named Freddie Gray died from injuries sustained while in police custody. Protests and rioting ensued, and gun violence in the city increased dramatically. The circumstances foreshadowed those in 2020: a surge in homicides that followed a death at police hands and a collapse in police-community trust, which led to changes in police behavior, and calls for non-police approaches to public safety. Amid the spike in violence, Corey Winfield decided to rejoin Safe Streets.

In his absence, Safe Streets had continued to struggle with the problem of workers falling back into crime: a site in West Baltimore had been suspended in 2013 after two of its workers were arrested, and in July, 2015, an East Baltimore office closed after police found drugs and seven guns there and arrested two workers. But the program retained enough support that, in 2018, the mayor at the time, Catherine Pugh, who had moved control of the program from the health department to city hall's public-safety office, expanded it from four sites to ten.

On Martin Luther King Day in 2018, I was in an East Baltimore church as Winfield told an audience drawn from several local congregations how violence interruption worked. Big Corey, as he is known, is six feet three inches tall and weighs two hundred and eighty pounds, and his size is matched by a bright-eyed, magnetic charm. He sketched out a typical scenario: "Anita calls me and says, 'Corey, my brother, I heard him talking, and they're going to kill Lisa's brother. Him and his buddies. 'Cause Lisa's brother gets out of work at three in the morning and they're going to get him.' So I say, 'O.K.,' so I'm gonna get up at two-thirty and I'm gonna be out there so that when Anita's brother jumps out on Lisa's brother they're going to see me. 'Oh, it's three in the morning. We ain't doing this, right?'"

Winfield continued, "Now, we know for a fact that three o'clock in the morning the police ain't around. The police don't mean a damn thing when somebody is coming to get killed. But somebody coming with guns, if they see *me*, that level of respect is high.



"But once that respect leaves," he added, alluding to his perceived independence from the police, "I'll be lying beside Lisa's brother. We cannot lose that, because that's all we have. That makes us, the effectiveness we have."

That year, a different model of community violence intervention was emerging. In Massachusetts, an organization called Roca, which had worked for years with high-risk young adults in gritty places like Chelsea, Lynn, and Springfield, was trying a new approach, using behavioral-theory techniques to help participants control their emotions.

The approach tapped into a new neuroscientific understanding of how trauma and harsh circumstances can keep people operating in survival mode—in their "bottom brain." Roca believed that participants needed to acquire basic emotional self-regulation before they could advance to job training and other forms of support. "What we know changes behavior is people feeling safe, being able to manage their emotions and begin to heal their trauma," Molly Baldwin, Roca's founder, said. Instead of mediating conflicts, as Cure Violence does, Roca was seeking to make young people less likely to be drawn into conflict in the first place.

The approach gained traction in Chicago, under the leadership of Eddie Bocanegra. Like Corey Winfield, Bocanegra had committed a murder; in 1994, at the age of eighteen, he had avenged the shooting of two members of a gang he belonged to. He served nearly fifteen years in prison; after his release, he joined Cure Violence. In 2011, he was among a handful of workers featured in "The Interrupters," a documentary film about the organization. Bocanegra, a slightly built man with a goatee, stands out in the film for his soft-spoken, cerebral bearing. One scene shows him doing good deeds, like delivering flowers, on the anniversary of the murder he'd committed. "I've thought of hopefully one day going to my victim's family and really just expressing to them how deeply sorry I am," he says. "It's just that, right now, I don't think it's still right."

Soon after the documentary was released, Bocanegra quit Cure Violence. He was becoming increasingly aware of what the focus on intervention was leaving out. "How can I expect someone to put their guns down when their basic needs aren't being addressed?" he said to me.

He became an organizer with the Community Renewal Society, a social-justice organization, while pursuing a master's degree in social work at the University of Chicago. By 2013, the Y.M.C.A. of Metro Chicago had hired him as its co-director of youth safety and violence prevention, working with some four hundred teen-agers, many of whom were involved in gangs. It was fulfilling work, but he was disturbed by

"No, I can't give any of them away—they're part of a collection."

the contrast between the investment that was made in the teen-agers and the paltry efforts made on their behalf after they turned eighteen.

Homicide rates remained well below their historic highs in Chicago, as they did nationally—in 2015, the city registered only four hundred and sixty-eight murders. But, late that year, the city released a video of a police officer firing sixteen shots at Laquan McDonald, a seventeen-year-old armed with a knife, killing him. As in previous episodes of excessive police force, in Ferguson and Baltimore, the video gave rise to protests, an erosion of police-community trust, and a sharp rise in deadly violence. In 2016, there were seven hundred and sixty-four homicides in Chicago.

The city's civic and business leaders committed seventy-five million dollars for violence-prevention efforts. Much of the funding went to a new initiative called READI Chicago, which took a different approach from that of Cure Violence. READI identified several hundred men, mostly in their twenties, who were recruited by outreach workers and referrals upon release from incarceration. The men had, on average, between four and five felony arrests each, and eighty per cent of them had been the victims of violence. The program provided them with twelve months of paid job training and employment plus cognitive-behavioral techniques. It was, by the standards of violence-prevention programs, an expensive undertaking—eventually, twenty-five thousand dollars per participant.

Eight years after Eddie Bocanegra completed his prison sentence for first-degree murder, he was chosen to lead the initiative.

In Baltimore, the expansion of Safe Streets faced challenges. The city had to find nonprofit organizations to manage the sites and people to staff them. Cure Violence had stopped leading training sessions some years earlier, after the city grew lax about paying its bills. Meanwhile, the leadership of city hall's public-safety office changed four times between 2017 and 2020.

Amid the disorder, several Safe Streets staff members left for jobs at a new anti-violence effort in the city: Roca. In 2018, the Massachusetts organization had opened a branch in Baltimore, the hometown of its leader, Molly Baldwin. Instead of targeting certain areas—even after its expansion, Safe Streets still covered only 2.6 of the city's ninety-two square miles—Roca focussed on some of the hardest-to-reach young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, drawn from across the city. They were generally referred to Roca by the police or by juvenile services; Roca came into contact with some through making regular visits to the homes of victims of nonfatal shootings. Within several years, the organization was working with about two hundred young men—applying cognitive-behavioral theory, putting some on job crews, and simply maintaining contact with them through the organization's practice of "relentless outreach." "It's the more long-term approach, the more meaningful, sustained behavior change that we're looking for," James (J.T.) Timpson, who left Safe Streets to join Roca in 2018, said. "While I believe that the intervention is extremely important, even intervention requires some type of follow-up. You can intervene today, but what happens tomorrow?"

In late December, 2020, Baltimore's new mayor, Brandon Scott, named as director of the public-safety office his longtime friend Shantay Jackson, a former information-technology manager who had embraced anti-violence activism after Freddie Gray's death and after her stepson was gravely injured in a 2018 shooting. She had led a nonprofit group that got the contract to oversee one of the new Safe Streets sites—a site that then experienced serious troubles despite being in the least dangerous of the ten locations. It shut down only a few months after opening, in 2019, a closure that Jackson attributed to concerns about the safety of the workers. (It was later reopened.)

A month after Jackson took over the public-safety office, Dante Barksdale, the champion of Safe Streets, was paying a visit to the Douglass Homes, a public-housing project in East Baltimore, on a Sunday morning. A gunman shot him in the head and body nine times, killing him.

Even in a city that had experienced more than three hundred homicides for six years in a row, the killing of the admired leader of the best-known violence-prevention program—its "heart and soul," according to Mayor Scott—was a big blow. "My heart is broken with the loss of my friend Dante Barksdale, a beloved leader in our community who committed his life to saving lives in Baltimore," Scott said.

Six months later, another Safe Streets worker, Kenyell (Benny) Wilson, was shot in the South Baltimore neighborhood of Cherry Hill while driving to lunch and died after making his way to the hospital. Two people familiar with the case told me that Wilson, who was forty-four, had reprimanded a teen-ager for being rude to an elderly woman, and his colleagues suspected that this had prompted the shooting. "Tonight, our brother Kenyell Wilson became a victim of the gun violence he worked every day to prevent," Mayor Scott said.

Six months after that, in January, 2022, DaShawn McGrier, a newly hired Safe Streets worker in McElderry Park, the program's first site, was on duty just after 7 P.M., standing with several other men, when a gunman drove up and started shooting, killing McGrier, who was twenty-nine, and two others and injuring a fourth man. Mayor Scott called the shooting a "horrific tragedy."

Three deaths, in thirteen months, in a program with fewer than a hundred workers. It was exactly the dark scenario that Corey Winfield had sketched out four years earlier: the orange T-shirt no longer provided enough protection.

At what point did a program's administrators need to decide that the work was simply too dangerous? "Three people lost their lives," Joseph Richardson, Jr., a University of Maryland ethnographer specializing in gun violence, said. "That's not normal. To have three Safe Streets workers killed, we need to assess what's going on."

Roca underscored the safety of its workers, who were paid at least sixty thousand dollars a year, compared with the forty-five thousand dollars that Safe Streets workers typically make. Roca was cautious about sending its staffers into areas when tensions were high, and, unlike Safe Streets, it maintained direct lines of communication with the police. "Are we really supposed to send another human being, not the police department, no equipment, in this day and age, when people are loaded up with automatic weapons?" Baldwin said. "To assume someone is going to listen to someone is to assume that they can access the thinking part of their brain."

Slutkin, the founder of Cure Violence, defended his approach. If violence interruption went awry, as it had in Baltimore, that was a sign that an individual program wasn't following the model correctly, he said. "The difference is always whether they're really doing it," he went on. "Let's say, in any given city, there's three places that are getting results and four aren't getting results. You can't just keep not getting results for the whole year." There are protocols for running an interrupter site, he said—from hiring the right people to reaching the right people on the street and keeping close track of outcomes.

Slutkin, who stepped down as the head of Cure Violence last year, referred to positive results in other cities, including Chicago and Philadelphia. But some experts have interpreted the results in these cities, and in others, as being more mixed. Jeff Butts, a sociologist at John Jay College who led a study in New York, told me that interrupter programs are fundamentally difficult to assess—it's hard to know whether a decline in shootings in an area is due to the interrupters or to all the other factors at play. The assessments typically tally only the shootings within the narrow boundaries of interrupter zones, even though the interrupters' work inevitably ranges farther afield.

Further complicating the research is that the approach varies so much from one site to another. "They live under the same banner, the same T-shirts, the same brand name, the same philosophy," Butts said. "But they all insist on doing things their own way."

To better gauge interrupters' effectiveness, researchers at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland were in talks with Baltimore's public-safety office last year to conduct a comprehensive study of Safe Streets that would include field observations and interviews with workers and participants for nine months. But the qualitative component of the study fell through, after city officials, citing costs, insisted that it run for fewer months. Richardson, of the University of Maryland, who would have led the field work, said that he plans to do a similar study in Washington, D.C., instead. "You can have all the numbers in the world," he said, "but if you don't understand how it plays out on the ground, without having that context you can't really capture the effectiveness of the program."

Programs such as Roca and READI Chicago are easier to assess, because they work with a defined group of men whose outcomes can be tracked. A randomized controlled study of READI Chicago released last year found that men who had participated in its eighteen-month program were nearly two-thirds less likely to be arrested for a shooting and nearly one-fifth less likely to be shot than men with similar backgrounds who had not been offered a place.

Cure Violence leaders were quick to put READI Chicago's results into context. Such programs help those who are fortunate enough to be enrolled, but what about all the other young men in the neighborhood? "You have programs like READI that maybe get fifty or a

CUPID'S ARROW VARIETY PACK
FLEETING CRUSH
Heeeeey...
Zooms right through and out the other side
Oh, never mind!
SITE-SPECIFIC
We should totally move to Portland.
SNAP
SLOW DISSOLVE
You still there?
Grunt.
ETERNAL OPTIMIST
I'M WITH ⇨

hundred guys, and that's what they're working with," Charlie Ransford, Cure Violence's director of science and policy, said. "But what if some guys get released from prison and they're not with them? What if a group of kids a few blocks over start getting into stuff and they're not helping them? We're community-based, they're looking at individuals. We're looking at the mass on a daily basis." Helping some young men get on track was essential, he said, but insufficient: "You need Cure Violence as the head of the spear."

Last winter, the competition suddenly took on broader ramifications. The Biden Administration created a position within the Department of Justice to oversee the distribution of two hundred and fifty million dollars for community-violence-intervention efforts, part of legislation passed in response to the mass shootings in Uvalde and Buffalo. Three decades after Eddie Bocanegra's murder conviction, and a decade after he left Cure Violence in search of a different approach, he was tasked with helping lead the federal government's response to the biggest surge of violence since the early-nineties wave that he had been part of.

Many cities are using some of their new funding to start or expand teams founded on the Cure Violence model, among them Atlanta, Charlotte, Columbus, Memphis, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Peoria, Winston-Salem, Nashville, and Wichita.

In Louisville, the launch of five new Cure Violence teams is being led by a city agency that did not exist until less than a decade ago. After a high-profile triple homicide in 2012, Mayor Greg Fischer created the Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods, which started out as essentially a one-man shop, run by Anthony Smith, a community organizer. It now has fifty employees. Unlike many of its counterparts in other cities, in recent years the agency has been led by people with deep expertise in violence prevention: Monique Williams, who stepped down in October, is a public-health researcher, and her successor, Paul Callanan, has worked as a probation officer and later led a gang-reduction initiative in Denver.

In collaboration with city and community leaders, they came up with a plan for the fifteen million dollars the office was getting, which included hiring case managers and funding two hospital-visitation programs and three of the five new interrupter teams. Separately, the city launched an effort based on David Kennedy's focussed deterrence, which, unlike Cure Violence, includes a major role for police and prosecutors.

Louisville was adopting a hybrid approach, bringing together focussed deterrence, interrupters, and long-term case management into a single ecosystem for violence reduction. Compared with Baltimore, where the city's public-safety office has presided over a falloff in coöperation between Safe Streets and Roca, Louisville has maintained a unified, citywide approach, with biweekly meetings to discuss specific incidents and individuals.

The sense of urgency is high in Louisville, where homicides nearly doubled in 2020, to a hundred and seventy-three, the most ever recorded. But Callanan told me that he is wary of the demand for quick action, fretting that federal deadlines for spending ARPA money—it must be committed by the end of 2024—wouldn't give cities time to build intervention efforts strong enough to justify continued local or state taxpayer support once the federal funding runs out, in 2026. "We're laying this expectation across the country that you can take a Cure Violence program and you can get it up and running in three months and you're going to have these dramatic results," he said. "The reality, historically, is it takes a long time to build these programs."

The interrupter model, Callanan noted, had been created during the Chicago gang wars of the nineties, before large gangs fractured into smaller crews, and before social media upended communication. "We have the challenge today of taking these concepts and putting them into play in our communities where the dynamics have completely changed," he told me.

This meant rethinking the profile of the ideal violence interrupter. Perhaps, he said, it was no longer necessarily the forty- or fiftysomething former gang member—"O.G."—who would have commanded respect a couple of decades ago. Now, with social media, youths could find notoriety much more quickly. "You may have a twenty-two-year-old with more clout than the forty-year-old guy who started a gang there," Callanan said. "You may be hiring individuals based on a gang background or a historical background that is no longer relevant today to the groups that you're dealing with."

"It's not about gang warfare anymore," a former administrator of Safe Streets told me. "The problem is more impulsive crazy shit." At a Y.M.C.A. in Louisville, I met Demetrius McDowell, who had been hired by a new interrupter site, in the Smoketown neighborhood, run by the nonprofit group YouthBuild. McDowell had spent years selling heroin before shifting his focus to real estate, which drug proceeds had helped him accumulate, and to efforts to help boys and young men stay off the path he had taken.

Despite his age—forty-three—McDowell was attuned to the swirl of online antagonism in the city. He described one of the most prevalent forms of social-media provocation: someone would live-stream a video of himself supposedly on rival territory, and a rival would challenge him to reveal his location—to "drop a pin"—or otherwise be deemed a coward. "If you're not tracking these things on their social network, you'll never know what's going on in the street," McDowell told me. "That's where I get all my information."

McDowell lasted less than two months on the YouthBuild team. He clashed with its leaders over a wish to continue building his own youth group, which had a contract with the Y.M.C.A. He also bristled at the adherence to protocols that Cure Violence trainers and one of the team's supervisors, a college graduate, demanded. "You need individuals who can relate to the community," he said, "but you got college guys coming in telling you how he thinks you should do it. A college fellow is telling me that you ought to do it this way because studies say this or that. It has to be a feel thing. . . . This educated guy has no type of experience. I'll take experience over data anywhere that could be manipulated."

With the new funding came expectations that the programs institute standardized training, conform to established guidelines, and collect copious data. But some of the interrupters viewed these demands as top-down cluelessness that undermined the organic nature of their work.

"We've had a couple that didn't work out," Lynn Rippy, YouthBuild's director, said. "We got them in for a little bit and realized that, in terms of the intake of information and the way we want to do business, that wasn't going to work for them. So it didn't work for us."

Last September, Eddie Bocanegra came to Baltimore to announce the distribution of the first hundred million dollars of the Department of Justice funds he oversees. He made the announcement not at city hall or at Safe Streets but at Roca, which was receiving two million dollars. Of some fifty other recipients nationwide, relatively few were interrupter programs.

A month later, Bocanegra was back in the city for the annual conference of Cities United, a national violence-prevention network founded in 2011 by, among others, the former Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter and the former New Orleans mayor Mitch Landrieu, and now led by Anthony Smith, the first director of Louisville's public-safety office. The two-day event drew hundreds of people from around the country, an indication that, thanks to the surge in federal funding, community violence intervention was experiencing a moment of arrival.

But, in a closed-door session with mayors and other top city officials, Bocanegra offered a cautionary note. The field, he said, "is so grossly underdeveloped. We continue to use two or three models from the nineteen-nineties and early two-thousands. This field has evolved, social media and technology have evolved, gangs have evolved. There are pockets of promising evidence and good models, but, because of a lack of investment, we're not seeing that return. If this was a board of directors running a Fortune 500 company, we'd ask ourselves some very serious questions about our investment." There was an unjust element to the pressure to produce results: police departments had, after all, received exponentially more resources for decades, even as violence remained high in many cities. "There's a lot of pressure to hurry up and reduce the violence," Shani Buggs, an assistant professor of public health at U.C. Davis who briefly worked for the Baltimore city government, said. Community violence intervention, she told me, "should be seen as a core city function, as police are seen as a core city function. There's never a question about whether they should get rid of the police department because violence hasn't gone down."

In Bocanegra's remarks, he stressed that the field wasn't doing enough to develop the workforce tasked with the actual intervention. Workers were not getting adequate support for the frequent traumas of the job, and rarely gained the skills to advance from street work. "We've overlooked so much talent and potential," he said. "We're not building the field."

The "credible messenger" approach meant shifting enormous emotional and physical risk onto people who had already been through a tremendous amount. The messengers were, in a sense, both the best and the worst people to do interrupter work. To address these concerns, some cities, including Baltimore, allocated part of their ARPA funds to provide counselling for their interrupters. Shantay Jackson, the head of Baltimore's public-safety office, said that the workers "are dealing with their own level of trauma, given their lived experiences, but also dealing with vicarious trauma as they do the work of interrupting violence every single day."

In Baltimore, the new funding was increasing the pressure. "We need to learn as much as we can from the things that we're rolling out, because in a couple of years we won't have fifty million dollars to throw at the problem," Councilman Mark Conway, the chairman of the public-safety committee, told me. "And, when we make a decision about where we pare back, we're going to need to look back at our data, we're going to need to look back at our systems, and make some tough decisions about where we get the best bang for the buck." Facing demands from the city council to show how the public-safety office was spending the money, Jackson released a breakdown—some was being given to nonprofit groups, some to the city's launch of a focussed-deterrence initiative, and some to new staff positions, expanding the office from fifteen to about forty.

At the same time, the public-safety office was losing two of its main liaisons to Safe Streets, raising the risk of further drift. And, as reported by the Baltimore Banner, the office was delaying Roca's contract to deliver services to young men involved in the focussed-deterrence initiative. The effort to build a unified violence-reduction ecosystem was foundering on turf battles and personal conflicts, though Jackson downplayed the tensions, saying that her office and Roca "continue to have conversations that I think have been very productive."

One evening in early December, I was on my way to meet Corey Winfield when he told me that he would have to postpone: in the Baltimore neighborhood of Brooklyn, where he was now the Safe Streets site director, a gang member had stolen a car from a member of another gang, and Winfield and his team were trying to get the car returned before anyone tried to avenge the theft.

It had been a tumultuous stretch for the Brooklyn site, which, like several others in the city, was now administered by Catholic Charities. In November, a former worker at the site had pleaded guilty to dealing fentanyl while he was employed by Safe Streets. The site, which was supposed to have seven workers, had only five. But Winfield was pleased about the progress of an interrupter he had recruited for another site, a thirty-eight-year-old man he had met in prison, who had survived three shootings. Winfield also took pride in the food distribution that his site had undertaken during the pandemic, and in his idea to begin distributing used purses and handbags filled with hygiene products to the many sex workers in the area.

A week later, I stopped by the Brooklyn Safe Streets office to see Winfield, but it appeared to be closed. I called him, and he told me that his aunt Ruth had just died, of cancer. I went to the wake, at a church in West Baltimore, where I found Winfield in the lobby, being consoled by several Safe Streets workers wearing orange sweatshirts.

He told me that he had been there for an hour and a half and hadn't been able to go in to see her. "I can face a firing squad and my heart will still be strong," he said. "But I've not been in there yet. It's the hardest thing I've ever had to do."

He also told me about another recent intervention. Three months earlier, a sex video involving high-school students had surfaced online, angering a rival group of teen-agers, who had beat up one participant, stealing his designer bag and sunglasses, then fired shots at a car belonging to another participant's mother.

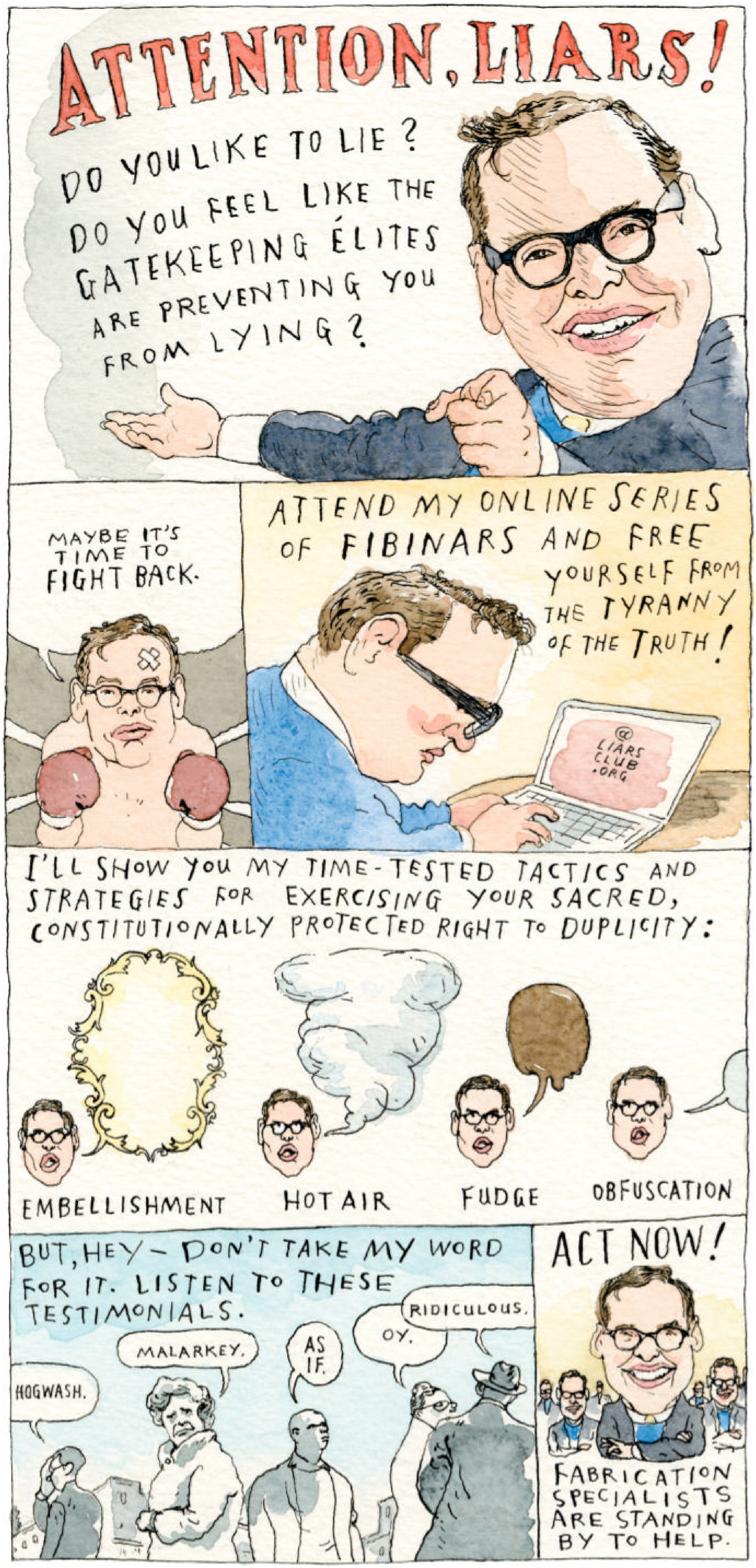
This was not in Winfield's Safe Streets zone, but he went to help. He reached out to the mother of a member of the retaliating group, fearing that she might be a target, and, for several days, he accompanied her on the bus to work. "It's how kids think now," he said. "If they can't get who they're targeting, they're going to get you."

He also reached out to the father of one of the students in the video; the man was known to Winfield as a "shot caller," someone who had the ability to arrange a killing or to defuse a conflict, and he had been making provocative comments about the episode online. At a 2 A.M. meeting on an abandoned block, arranged by the superiors in the crew that the father belonged to, Winfield urged him to de-escalate. "We were able to resolve it. That's what we do out here," Winfield said. "We squashed it. But nobody knows about those kinds of stories."

Two weeks after the wake, a couple of miles west of the church, five high-school students were shot outside a Popeyes across from their school, at lunch. One of them, a sixteen-year-old, died. For Roca's staff, it was a delicate situation—the murder victim was the younger brother of a Roca participant, and Roca leaders wanted to proceed strategically with their outreach to the other victims. Corey Winfield, in contrast, wanted to get involved immediately. He knew that retaliation was likely, and he wanted Safe Streets on the scene, figuring out who might seek vengeance. But the shooting was several miles from his site.

Winfield called me to voice his frustration. "We need to get on top of that now," he said. "This is the real shit, right here. This needs to be handled right now. We don't have a week or two. More kids are going to die." ♦

SKETCHBOOK BY BARRY BLITT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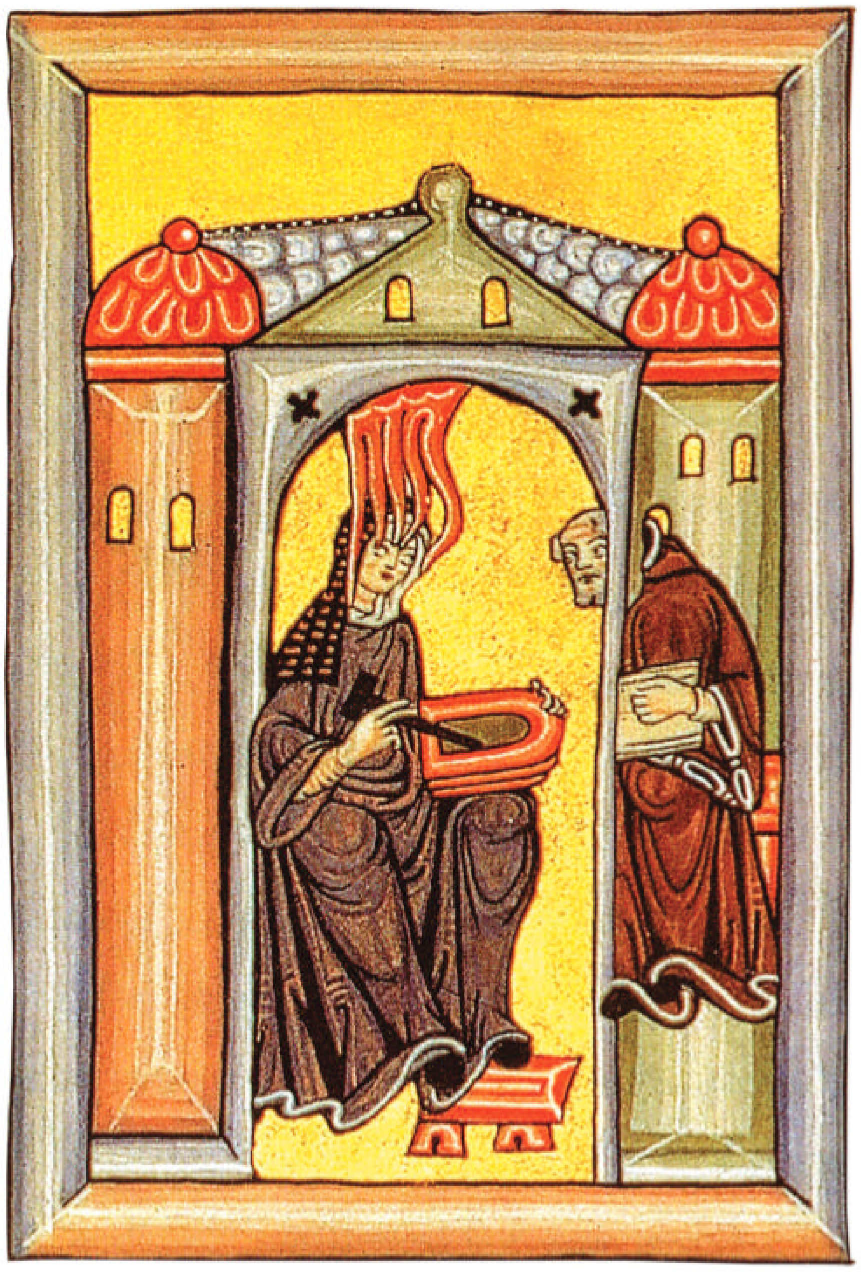
ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE FIRST COMPOSER

The cosmic musical visions of Hildegard of Bingen.

BY ALEX ROSS



Hildegard receiving a vision, in the medieval manuscript “Scivias.”

ART RESERVE / ALAMY

Disibodenberg, a nine-hundred-year-old Benedictine monastery in the Rhineland region of western Germany, is a majestically dismal ruin, its roofless buildings overrun by ivy and interspersed with stands of oak, ash, and beech. When I searched out the site, last May, I was the only visitor. I half expected to come across Caspar David Friedrich painting at an easel. One sector, consisting of scattered blocks and fragments of walls, is marked with a sign, in German: “Area of the Hildegard Convent (12th Cent.).” This, according to one guess, is where the nun, theologian, poet, and composer Hildegard of Bingen spent about forty years of her eight-decade life. In her teens, she was enclosed with two other nuns at the monastery, seemingly destined for a life of anonymous devotion. Something of the ambience of the place seeps into Hildegard’s hymn to St. Disibod, the Irish bishop for whom the monastery is named: “You hid yourself out of sight / drunk with the smell of flowers in the windows of the saints / reaching towards God.”

Hildegard did not stay out of sight. In 1146 or 1147, when she was in her late forties, she wrote a letter to the French cleric Bernard of Clairvaux—a leading figure in the Cistercian Order, an architect of the Knights Templar, a propagandist of the Crusades—in which she disclosed that she had been experiencing religious visions. The letter begins with protestations of humility, seeking recognition for her newfound calling, but by the end it radiates the fearsome certitude of a prophet in the pulpit:

> And so I beseech you, through the serenity of the Father, through his wondrous Word, through the sweet fluid of remorse, through the spirit of truth, through the sacred sound to which all creation resounds, through the Word that gave birth to the world, through the sublimity of the Father whose sweet *viriditas* [viridity, verdancy] released the Word in the Virgin’s womb, where it took on flesh like a honeycomb built out from honey: may this same sound, the power of the Father, descend on your heart and elevate your soul so that you do not remain idly numb to this person’s words.

Bernard must have been taken aback by this letter from an unknown nun. In his reply, he cloaks himself in the timeless condescension of the bigwig: “The press of business forces me to respond more briefly than I would have liked.” Still, Hildegard’s conviction impresses him: “When the learning and the anointing (which reveals all things to you) are within, what advice could we possibly give?” As it turned out, Bernard’s approval was superfluous, for Hildegard also secured the blessing of Pope Eugene III. For the remainder of her life—she died in 1179—she held sway as a seer, her teachings heeded by Popes and emperors alike.

Hildegard’s letter to Bernard, incantatory in rhythm and poetic in imagery, encapsulates several of her preoccupations. It emphasizes the interdependence of spirituality and nature. It trains attention on the body of the Virgin Mary, not merely as a vessel of divinity but as a holy domain unto itself. Most strikingly, it casts the Word as “sacred sound.” In Hildegard’s telling, Paradise was a place of pure, many-voiced music, and it falls to the prophets to revive the lost angelic concert, through a fusion of word and melody. Hildegard herself devised such music—a cycle of seventy-seven liturgical songs, which she called “Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum,” or “Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations.” They are pieces of spectacular length and breadth, dissolving syllables into endless melismatic flights.

Around 1150, Hildegard left Disibodenberg and founded a new abbey in the area of Bingen, about fifteen miles to the northeast. While Disibodenberg was and remains a secluded place, Rupertsberg, as the new institution was called, had a conspicuous perch on the banks of the Rhine. Hildegard later opened a secondary convent across the river, in Eibingen. Few traces of the original buildings remain, but high on a hill above Eibingen stands the Hildegard Abbey, a suitably imposing neo-Romanesque complex that dates from 1904. In the course of the twentieth century, the abbey's nuns helped to bring about a surge of interest in Hildegard, preparing editions of her writings and recording her music. She had never been forgotten, but modern Catholicism has embraced her as a symbol of piety and creativity intertwined. In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI announced Hildegard's canonization and named her a Doctor of the Church—a title that has been bestowed on only thirty-six other figures.

Hildegard's fame has also crossed over into zones of New Age spirituality, environmental discourse, and feminist thought. In the gift shop at the Hildegard Abbey, you can find self-help texts along the lines of "Strengthen the Immune System with Hildegard of Bingen." Fiction about Hildegard is a genre unto itself: there have been at least twenty novels in various languages, including two crime stories. The growth of the phenomenon had much to do with the serene allure of Hildegard's music. In 1982, the British group Gothic Voices released a rapt album titled "A Feather on the Breath of God: Sequences and Hymns by Abbess Hildegard of Bingen," which became a cult item. The Sequentia ensemble followed with a nine-CD survey of Hildegard's output. These and other releases have sold hundreds of thousands of copies.

Long overlooked in music history, Hildegard now possesses immense stature. Staff notation, which enabled the preservation of musical creations, had arisen less than a century before she was born; most early notations are anonymous in origin, and the concept of a professional composer would not take hold for several centuries. Still, musical personalities began to emerge in this period, and Hildegard was one of the first to exhibit a recognizable voice. The contradiction that she represents—a woman presiding over the earliest stages of the male-dominated Western canon—has had a galvanic effect on contemporary female composers, who see in her the shape of sound to come.

The turbulence of Hildegard's century justified some of her more apocalyptic utterances. The Holy Roman Empire and the papacy were locked in conflict; the Crusades cut deathly swaths across the Middle East; a rising urban culture challenged the clerical and monarchical order. Hildegard held fast to the papal line, going so far as to send admonitory messages to Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who assumed the Italian throne in 1155 and vainly tried to subdue Rome. In one such letter, Hildegard compares the Emperor to "a little boy or some madman"; in another, she channels the voice of God and warns that "my sword will pierce you."

She was born into a wealthy, estate-owning family, probably in Bermersheim, east of Disibodenberg. According to one account, she was promised to the Church as a human tithe, because she was her parents' tenth child. Disibodenberg had been established just a few years before Hildegard was consigned there, and Jutta, the resident nun, at first had only her niece and Hildegard in her charge. The enclosure ceremony followed the format of a funeral rite: the women were, in essence, being buried alive, in service to the Lord. They communicated with the outside world through a single aperture, which, when not in use, was blocked with stones. Or so claimed a monk who knew Hildegard in her final years; the task of separating fact from myth in her biography is arduous.

When Jutta died, in 1136, Hildegard assumed leadership of the Disibodenberg convent, which eventually grew to include about twenty women. A few years later, she had her first full-scale visions, which were usually accompanied by spells of trancelike immobility and racking pain. Recounting these incidents in the third person, Hildegard says that she "suffers in her inmost being and in the veins of her flesh"—that she is "distressed in mind and sense and endures great pain of body." Various attempts have been made to attribute these spells to illness; one theory, popularized by Oliver Sacks, holds that she experienced severe migraines. The music historian Margot Fassler, in her new book, "Cosmos, Liturgy, and the Arts in the Twelfth Century," points out an obvious problem with such speculation: many people have migraines, but "to have the kinds of visions Hildegard underwent does not follow as a matter of course."

Despite these periods of incapacitation, Hildegard was no self-scouring ascetic, as Jutta had been. On the contrary, she preferred rather lavish trappings, especially after she moved her community to Rupertsberg. The literature contains a letter from a woman named Tengswich, who complains to Hildegard about "strange and irregular practices" that have been observed at Rupertsberg, such as the following: "They say that on feast days your virgins stand in the church with unbound hair when singing the psalms and that as part of their dress they wear white, silk veils, so long that they touch the floor. Moreover, it is said that they wear crowns of gold filigree." Tengswich further comments that the convent excludes those of "lower birth and less wealth." Hildegard, in reply, argues that whereas married women are wintry husks and comport themselves accordingly, virgins are like blooming flowers, representing the "unsullied purity of Paradise."

The most curious episode in Hildegard's biography—two approachable accounts are Fiona Maddocks's "Hildegard of Bingen: The Woman of Her Age," from 2001, and Honey Meconi's "Hildegard of Bingen," from 2018—concerns a reportedly beautiful young nun named Richardis of Stade, who had followed Hildegard from Disibodenberg to Rupertsberg. In 1151, Richardis was appointed the abbess of a convent far to the north, near Bremen, where her brother happened to be the archbishop. Hildegard launched a furious campaign to stop the transfer, her letters displaying, as Maddocks writes, a "palpable tone of panic and petulance." When these efforts went nowhere—one reply from Pope Eugene simmers with exasperation—Hildegard appealed to Richardis herself, in nakedly emotional terms: "Daughter, listen to me, your mother, speaking to you in the spirit. My grief flies up to Heaven. My sorrow is destroying the great confidence and consolation that I once had in mankind."

The intensity of Hildegard's attachment to Richardis has led some to wonder whether the relationship was erotically charged. The possibility cannot be ruled out, although any project of remaking Hildegard as a Sapphic icon runs up against her explicit condemnations of homosexual acts. The one clear thing about this murky business is Hildegard's colossal stubbornness. Refusing to acknowledge the role of her own will, she considered the presence of Richardis to be divinely ordered. When the younger nun died, not long after leaving Rupertsberg, Hildegard felt grimly vindicated. To Richardis's brother, she wrote that God had too deeply favored this paragon of beauty to surrender her to a "heartless lover—that is, to the world."

As imperious as Hildegard was in dealing with exterior threats, she seems not to have been a particularly severe taskmaster inside the convent. A posthumous biography titled "The Life of Hildegard" says that she was neither "disturbed by blame nor seduced by praise"—that she "kept her soul as taut and ready as a stretched bow with every discipline." A vivid personality emerges from these sources: a charismatic woman, at times overbearing, at times vulnerable, relentlessly adhering to her plan.

Hildegard's literary production was vast: three major volumes ("Scivias," "Book of Life's Merits," and "Book of Divine Works"); a medical treatise ("Causes and Cures"); a discourse on science and healing ("Physica"); the sacred songs ("Symphoniae"); a musical morality play ("Order of the Virtues"); and the letters, of which some three hundred and fifty survive. The books were assembled in the Rupertsberg scriptorium, where nuns transcribed Hildegard's prose and inserted illustrations of her ideas. Two glorious documents of that labor long remained in the possession of Hildegard's community: a compilation known as the Riesencodex, or Giant Codex, and an illuminated version of "Scivias," whose creation Hildegard supervised. The former survived and can be viewed online. The latter went missing in East Germany after the Second World War, but the nuns of the Hildegard Abbey had earlier made an immaculate replica.

In the upper left of the first page of "Scivias"—short for "Scito vias Domini," or "Know the Ways of the Lord"—we see a depiction of Hildegard in a chapel-like space, receiving a vision. She is seated with her feet on a stool, writing with a stylus on a wax tablet. Volmar, a learned monk who served for decades as her secretary, is observing from an adjoining room. Five tongues of flame descend and touch her face, looking curiously like the tentacles of a squid. The text launches into a verbal evocation of the moment: "And behold! In the forty-third year of my earthly course, as I was gazing with great fear and trembling attention at a heavenly vision, I saw a great splendor in which resounded a voice from Heaven, saying to me, 'O fragile human, ashes of ashes, and filth of filth! Say and write what you see and hear. But, since you are timid in speaking, and simple in expounding, and untaught in writing, speak and write these things not by a human mouth . . . but as you see and hear them on high in the heavenly places in the wonders of God.'" The first of many proto-surrealist prose poems follows:

> I saw a great mountain the color of iron and enthroned on it One of such great glory that it blinded my sight. On each side of him there extended a soft shadow, like a wing of wondrous breadth and length. Before him at the foot of the mountain stood an image full of eyes on all sides in which because of those eyes I could discern no human form. In front of this image stood another, a child wearing a tunic of subdued color but white shoes upon whose head such glory descended from the One enthroned upon that mountain that I could not look at its face.

There is no writing quite like this in medieval literature. The style recalls that of the Book of Revelation and the Old Testament prophets, but the combination of dispassionate specificity and pictorial fantasy looks ahead to the visions of William Blake. Hildegard's account of Creation, for example, contains this description: "Suddenly a dark sphere of air appeared, huge in size, upon which the shining flame struck many blows, and at each blow a spark flew up." The illustrators respond in kind: the images sometimes look more like twentieth-century outsider art than like conventional iconography of the period.

Scholars debate the degree to which Hildegard was responsible for every aspect of her published legacy—prose, poetry, illustrations, music. Many hands went into the making of her works; according to her own testimony, Volmar polished her faulty Latin. The extant texts, especially the letters, were doubtless embroidered over time. Hildegard herself would presumably have rejected the idea that she was a creator in the modern sense; everything came from God. Better to think of the corpus as the product of a guild, with Hildegard at its head. All the same, there is no mistaking the singular voice that is stamped on each artifact. Hildegard was, it might be said, the Andy Warhol of a spiritual Factory on the Rhine.

The secular fad for Hildegard has encouraged perceptions of her as a religious renegade, a far-out mystic. She was, in fact, fairly doctrinaire in her beliefs, despite her penchant for psychedelic imagery. Her writings caused no scandal like the one unleashed by the twelfth-century theologian Peter Abelard, who, after espousing principles of universal reason and individual intention, faced accusations of heresy. Hildegard cherished virginity as the supreme virtue; Abelard was castrated on account of his secret marriage to his gifted young student Heloïse.

Nonetheless, Hildegard's thinking is rife with idiosyncrasies, particularly concerning the role of women. Barbara Newman, in her 1987 book, "Sister of Wisdom," argues that Hildegard resists the misogyny of Catholic doctrine. For example, her tendency to pair Eve with the Virgin Mary suggests that the bearer of original sin also becomes the agent of redemption. Hildegard habitually invokes female frailty—"I, a poor little figure of a woman" is a recurring formula—yet her self-deprecation is double-edged, as Newman observes: "Because the power of God is perfected in weakness, because the humblest shall be the most exalted, human impotence could become the sign and prelude of divine empowerment."

When Hildegard addressed male-female relationships, she performed a subtle rebalancing. Newman highlights a line in "Scivias" that purports to cite the words of St. Paul: "Woman was created for the sake of man, and man for the sake of woman." In fact, St. Paul says nothing of the sort, explicitly declaring, "Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man." Hildegard's relatively evenhanded view of gender relations also surfaces in "Causes and Cures," which, like many medieval texts of its kind, is startlingly candid about sex. Male love is characterized as "blazing heat," as a "storm of lust"; the love of a woman, by contrast, is "mild and gentle, yet steady." One passage seems to give a persuasive and sympathetic depiction of female orgasm: "When a woman is making love with a man, a sense of heat in her brain, which brings with it sensual delight, communicates the taste of that delight during the act and summons forth the emission of the man's seed."

Hildegard could, in other words, be bracingly down-to-earth in her advice on worldly matters. "Physica" is essentially an aggregation of folk wisdom, some of which remains à la mode. Its promotion of the healing effects of aloe, chamomile, and spelt is fit for quotation on health-food packaging. Other prescriptions are less practical for modern readers: "If someone has jaundice, strike a bat gently, so it does not die. Tie it over his loins, with the back of the bat turned toward the person's back. After a little while, take it off, and tie it over his stomach. Leave it there until it dies." We are told that eating a heron heart turns a sad mind happy; that applying the right ear of a lion to a deaf person's ear restores hearing; that eels are a fine meal for healthy people but make ill people "bitter in mind, crafty, and evil." There is also advice about the medical usefulness of the body parts of unicorns, dragons, and basilisks.

In all, Hildegard comes across as something of a world-maker, the inventor of a richly appointed fantasy realm. She goes so far as to fashion her own language—the "Lingua Ignota," or "Unknown Tongue"—which has a vocabulary of more than a thousand words. God is "AIGONZ"; the Devil is "diuueliz"; tongue is "ranzgia"; womb is "veriszoil." The purpose of the Lingua remains obscure, but Sarah Higley, in a monograph on the subject, plausibly describes it as an attempt at "making the things of this world divine again through the alterity of new signs." In the antiphon "O orzchis Ecclesia," Hildegard interpolates invented words into a Latin text:

> O immense [*orzchis*] Church
> girded by divine arms
> and ornamented in jacinth
> Thou art the fragrance [*caldemia*]
> of the wounds of peoples [*loifolum*]

The blurring of meaning into sound has the effect of pulling language into the nocturnal landscape of music, where, in Hildegard's view, ultimate truth resided.

Modern musical notation stemmed from an assertion of centralized authority. The Holy Roman Emperors, beginning with Charlemagne, wished to propagate a uniform version of liturgical chant across their territories, and notation facilitated that process, eliminating local deviations. Early chants tended not to show distinctive features, but composers soon introduced artful elaborations, which drew the scrutiny of doctrinal watchdogs. The Cistercian Order, as part of its campaign against luxury and pomp, discouraged melodies that indulged in excessively long melismas or had a range wider than an octave.

If Hildegard's songs had circulated in her lifetime, her disdain for such regulations might have proved controversial. Consider the responsory "O vos angeli" ("O you angels"), the text of which appears in "Scivias." Angels, archangels, cherubim, seraphim, and other higher powers are exalted because they "see the inward force of the Father,/which breathes from his heart like a face./Praise to you, who behold in the fountain/the strongbox of the ancient heart." In a transcription in modern notation, the setting departs from the E above middle C, at the lower end of the soprano range. During a fifty-one-note melismatic passage on the first syllables, the line gyrates between the C above middle C and the G *below* middle C—deep in the contralto register. The traversal of an octave and a fourth already exceeds Cistercian boundaries, but the adventures in angelic regions have just begun. At the mention of the archangels, who "receive the souls of the just," the music climbs to a stratospheric D, more than two octaves above middle C. The same note figures in an eighty-note melisma on the first syllable of the song's final word, *aspicitis* ("behold").

These are the earmarks of an ambitious composer who is pushing the limits of the singable. The range of "O vos angeli"—two octaves plus a fifth—exceeds that of Wagner's Isolde or of Strauss's Salome. One musicologist, Vincent Corrigan, has suggested that copyists must have made a mistake in notating the clefs, with the result that the first section is pitched too low. When I consulted with the Hildegard specialist Jennifer Bain, though, she pointed out that several other Hildegard chants prowl in the lower range, especially in opening sections. Possibly, the line was subdivided among members of the convent ensemble, so that contraltos handled the opening and high sopranos took the climaxes. One person can, in fact, sing the entire thing, as the Finnish soprano Anneliina Rif has proved, in a hypnotic recording on

"Some potholes you can avoid, some you can't."

the Alba label. Certainly, this exploration of vocal extremes is an apt metaphor for the celestial sphere.

When Hildegard's music first became known, in the later nineteenth century, the exceptional breadth of "O vos angeli" and several other of her chants excited comment. In fact, as Bain and other scholars have shown, this feature was not as unusual as it appeared. Despite the mandates against undue complexity, many other expansive pieces can be found in eleventh- and twelfth-century repertories, notably those of Germany. The chants of the eleventh-century theorist and composer Hermann of Reichenau move across a broad span, and they are also organized around primary tones of the fifth and the octave. (In the key of C, this would be F, G, and the C above.) Hildegard, too, liked to hit those structural nodes: some of her chants begin with a dramatic rising gesture of a fifth followed by a fourth.

Such resemblances hardly diminish Hildegard's originality. Bain, in an essay on the composer's style, writes, "Even while working within an established repertorial style, she also played with the structural forms that she received." A musical narrative unfolds by way of calculated repetitions and nuanced variations. Conspicuous extensions of the line often coincide with crucial statements in the texts. Bain notes that Hildegard's chant "O Jerusalem" begins "in a contained, almost subdued way, with a narrow range and short melodic phrases," before scaling the heights: "The climactic pitch G also occurs at a critical moment in the text when Hildegard makes the connection between heaven, the saints, and the humans who are singing their praises."

Here is the essence of the art of composing: the ability to conceive music in architectural terms, as a shaping of sound through time. The most stunning thing about Hildegard's creations is how they demarcate structure through a single melodic line. (Bach accomplished the same feat in his pieces for solo cello and solo violin, but he had the advantage of four strings.) This past fall, the Los Angeles Philharmonic presented a multi-composer event titled "Electric Fields," during which the soprano Barbara Hannigan gave semi-operatic renditions of two Hildegard chants—"O vis aeternitatis" and "O virga mediatrix." I'd heard Hildegard sung in church spaces, but it was a new thrill to encounter her in an auditorium built for Beethoven and Mahler. I thought of the latter's comment about his Eighth Symphony: "Imagine the entire universe beginning to ring and resound." With Hildegard, we hear the cosmos singing in one voice.

Hildegard suffered a crushing humiliation in the final year of her life. The Rupertsberg convent had arranged for the burial of a wealthy patron who had been excommunicated, for unknown reasons. Officials in Mainz, ignoring the fact that the man had repented of his sins, decreed that until the body was removed the nuns would be forbidden to sing Mass. Hildegard, in her reply, unleashed another masterpiece of righteous rage, acidly asking the prelates of Mainz if they were "certain that you are drawn to this action out of zeal for God's justice, rather than out of indignation, unjust emotions, or a desire for revenge." Music is the language of God, she thundered; only the Devil would seek to forbid it. This time, her intransigence won out, and her nuns were allowed to resume singing Mass. She died six months later.

In hindsight, the effort to silence Hildegard feels like a premonition. Within the walls of a convent, she had found latitude to cultivate her gifts; so had other brilliant religious women of the late medieval period, such as Roswitha, Herrad of Landsberg, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Marguerite Porete. But when universities began to replace monasteries as centers of learning an all-male regime took hold. The Catholic philosopher Prudence Allen notes that women were officially excluded from the University of Paris by 1231; Hildegard found no place in the curriculum. Even as European civilization moved toward the putative liberation of the Renaissance, it was undergoing a social regression. Women continued making music in convents and in aristocratic spaces, but for many centuries none could equal Hildegard's reach.

Contemporary female composers have often saluted Hildegard as the one who blazed a difficult path. A memorable ceremony took place in 1993, at CBGB, the venerable arena of rock aggression. A quartet of New York composers—Eve Beglarian, Kitty Brazelton, Elaine Kaplinsky, and Mary Jane Leach—walked through the venue draped in black, holding candles and singing Hildegard antiphons. Subsequent generations have paid their respects, albeit in ways that might well have baffled the honoree. Lingua Ignota, an experimental-pop project launched by the multidisciplinary artist Kristin Hayter, takes its name from Hildegard's "unknown tongue" and channels her spirit through darkly vengeful chants that unfurl before walls of noise. The Australian American singer-composer Jane Sheldon, by contrast, cherishes Hildegard's regard for the divinity of nature. For an installation in a former timber mill in Tasmania, Sheldon is writing a composition based on Hildegard's "O nobilissima viriditas," which begins with the lines "O noblest green viridity / you who are rooted in the sun."

Nothing in Hildegard's philosophy is more pertinent to our wounded planet than her concept of *viriditas*—greenness, verdancy, fecundity. She almost always associates the term with the female body, especially with the womb, and it counterbalances the violence of male sexuality. At the same time, it is the primary medium of God's power on earth. Hildegard's final theological testament, "Book of Divine Works," begins with a vision of Caritas, the spirit of Divine Love, who, clad in a robe as bright as the sun, speaks as nature incarnate:

> I am the supreme and fiery force who sets all living sparks alight and breathes forth no mortal things, but judges them as they are. Circling above the circumscribing circle with my superior wings, which is to say circling with wisdom, I have ordered the cosmos rightly. But I am also the fiery life of divine essence: I blaze above the beauty of the fields, I shine in the waters, I burn in the sun and the moon and the stars. And with the airy wind I quicken all things to life, as with an invisible life that sustains them all. For the air lives in *viriditas* and in the flowers, and the waters flow as if alive, and the sun lives within its own light, and when the moon has waned it is rekindled by the light of the sun and thereby lives anew, and the stars shine forth in their own light as though alive.

Caritas is, naturally, a woman, and, like the virgins of Hildegard's convent, her head is covered with a band of gold. ◆

SHOUTS & MURMURS

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

WHAT DOES WRITING SMELL LIKE?

BY ALYSSA BRANDT

I was on my way to Everything Mason Jars one day when I saw a fancy-candle store. I've been wanting a fancy candle for some time, so I popped in.

Sandra (not her real name): Hi, welcome to Everything Candles! We have a hundred different fragrances. I'm Sandra. Can I help you?

Me: Do you have a candle that smells like writing?

Sandra: What does writing smell like?

Me: Ozone, maybe? With top notes of burning, or metal, or burning metal. Or an electrical fire. Live wires sparking and smoking. Solder? Something that blends the flash of an idea and the slow burn of wrestling it into something real. Something that will get me fat stacks or fame. Do you have anything that smells like that?

Sandra: I'm not sure. . . . We have one that smells like cotton.

Me: Cotton, O.K., I might be able to work with that. Clean, like freshly laundered sheets pinned to a line in the sun, next to a country cottage or a villa, which is empty except for a table and chair for writing, perhaps near a meadow or orchard for meditative walks in the fresh morning air.

Sandra: We do have an apple-scented candle!

Me: No, that will make me hungry and want to get a snack. Getting a snack is not writing.

Sandra: Just a quick snack and then you'll get right back to it. It's not like you're cooking a meal.

Me: Steak! I'm certain that writing smells like steak. Iron and blood. Lighter fluid and charcoal. Fuel. Sustenance for hours and hours of writing. Chewing on concepts, working the gristle over and over in my maw, macerating the words into submission. Do you have any candles that smell like a well-marbled steak?

Sandra: We have several different apple scents: apple piñon, apple maple demerara, apple blossom bourbon . . .

Me: Bourbon! Of course! Of course writing smells like alcohol. A candle to conjure the spirits of the literary greats and the libations they used to lubricate their wheels of genius. Vodka? Gin? A dirty Martini with olive juice, a twist of lemon, and a dash of Texas Pete? A bracing Sancerre? A heady Barbaresco that stains the teeth and dulls the roar of negative talk like "That's dreck," "You suck," "Drivel," "Derivative," "Pabulum," and "Boring." What was Hemingway's drink?

Sandra: Daiquiri.

Me: Trick question! What wasn't Hemingway's drink?

Sandra: When he lived in Cuba, he drank daiquiris. I watched a program on PBS about him. A bartender named one after him, the Papa Doble. You can Google it.

Me: Do you have a daiquiri candle?

Sandra: I'm pretty sure we have a piña-colada candle. Will that work?

Me: Possibly. Pineapple, coconut, rum, lime, the tropics, a desert-island vibe. A desert-island-with-bad-Wi-Fi vibe. No distractions. Isolation. The Kon-Tiki with a typewriter.

Sandra: You use a typewriter?

Me: The inky aroma of typewriter ribbon, the woody scent of new Ticonderoga No. 2s, eau de Wite-Out and natural-rubber-eraser base notes.

Sandra: What about lavender? Lavender is calming.

Me: Lavender is a "having written" scent. An it's-3-A.M.-and-holy-shit-the-draft-is-finally-fucking-finished, adrenaline-draining scent. A scent to soothe the euphoria and invite sleep. It's the whatever-you-take-after-you've-had-too-much-cocaine scent. . . . Wait a minute—do you have a candle that smells like cocaine?

Sandra: We have candles that smell like pine, juniper, eucalyptus, and mint. Maybe a bracing scent like that?

Me: What about something that smells like grinding gears, machine-shop grease, and oil-smeared rags? Something that smells like the whole project will go up in flames, burn to the ground, and leave nothing but a pile of smoldering ash? Might you have something in the back with a smoldering-ash thing happening?

Sandra: Everything we have is out. I don't know what you were sniffing before you came in here, but may I offer you this Mason jar of coffee beans? It helps cleanse the nasal palate.

Me: Coffee. Writing definitely smells like coffee. Smoky, bittersweet, plentiful, dark perfection. A lightning bolt of caffeinated acid striking simultaneously at the heart, the mind, and the gut. Fuelling fast-flying fingers across the keyboard.

Sandra: I'm sorry—you're starting to scare me.

Me: Scent of fear? Of rejection and despair? Of beating the same dead horse of an idea over and over again? Do you have any candles that smell like dead horse?

Sandra: Let me get the manager. ♦

LETTER FROM UKRAINE

THE COLLABORATORS

Taking sides during the Russian occupation of Izyum.

BY JOSHUA YAFFA

It didn't take long for Russia's invasion to reach Izyum, a city of fifty thousand people on the Siverskyi Donets River, in eastern Ukraine. Within days, Russian warplanes were dropping heavy munitions on residential districts; by late March of last year, Russian tanks rumbled through the town center. As the Ukrainian Army retreated, it blew up the city's main bridge for automobile traffic, a futile attempt to slow the Russian advance which split Izyum in two: left bank and right bank, with only a pedestrian bridge and a pontoon crossing laid by Russian troops connecting one side with the other. A Russian officer known as Shere Khan, a nom de guerre borrowed from Kipling's "The Jungle Book," assumed the position of military commandant.

Russian forces installed several locals to run the city administration. A former police officer and failed mayoral candidate named Vladislav Sokolov took the post of acting mayor. He began appearing around town, trailed by a phalanx of Russian soldiers, boasting of repair works and food-aid deliveries. "We have huge plans, and Russia will lend us its support in realizing them," he was quoted as saying in the Izyum *Telegraph*, a newspaper published by the occupation authorities. Shelling and air strikes had left much of the city in ruins. Ukrainian officials estimated that eighty per cent of residential buildings had been damaged or destroyed. The electricity was out across town, which also meant that there was no water in the taps. A rocket had torn off a wall of the city's main hospital; doctors performed surgeries in the basement using a portable lamp powered by a diesel generator. Sokolov urged residents with relevant skills to come out from their bomb shelters and join the rebuilding effort. "We're experiencing a lack of manpower," he said.

Across the city, residents faced the choice of whether to coöperate with the new regime. Dozens of municipal employees went back to work for Russian-appointed bosses. A handful of existing cops joined the city's "people's militia," a Russian-backed police force, as did a motley crew of security guards, handymen, and car mechanics. A station dubbed Radio Z appeared on the airwaves, with local voices broadcasting basic information, such as how to avoid stepping on a land mine, and a heavy dose of pro-Russian

Mikhailo Dzhos, who was detained and tortured by Russian forces, believes that his

neighbor betrayed him. "I would like her to bear responsibility for my suffering," he says.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMILE DUCKE

propaganda. The occupation administration encouraged parents to send their children back to school, and teachers were pressured to return to the classroom with a Russian curriculum that rejected Ukrainian language and identity.

Residents agreed to collaborate for a number of often overlapping reasons: fear, pro-Russian sympathies, opportunism, the hope of doing something productive for the city. Power dynamics were fluid and hard to parse. Russian forces acted as if the takeover of Izyum was permanent and immutable, announcing preparations to distribute Russian passports and to hold a referendum on the occupied territories joining Russia. The Ukrainian government warned that anyone who worked with the occupation administration would face consequences. "I want to address those officials who did not hold their noses at entering into a dialogue with the occupiers," President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a national address delivered in March. "If any of you are tempted by their offer, you are signing your own sentence."

One morning in April, Pavel Golub, the owner of a mobile-phone-accessory shop in town, walked to the pedestrian bridge and joined a large crowd of people waiting for some kind of official announcement. A rumor had spread that able-bodied men might be offered additional food in exchange for volunteer work. Golub was thirty, with close-cropped hair, deep-set eyes, and thick, muscular arms; before the war, weight lifting had been his passion. He lived with his wife, Iryna, and her twelve-year-old son, Danil, in a white brick house on a side street lined with cherry trees. The local economy had stopped functioning, leaving Golub with a storeroom full of product and no customers. His family had to rely on Russian aid, which tended to be sporadic and insufficient. Residents often stood in line for hours only to leave hungry and disappointed.

At the bridge, Sokolov asked for volunteers to dig out bodies from the rubble of a ruined building. Golub and a dozen others stepped forward. The site was a five-story apartment block on Pervomaiska Street that had been hit by an air strike in the early days of the war. The middle section of the building had collapsed and crashed through to the cellar, where residents had taken shelter. Forty-four people were killed. Golub knew many of them, including a childhood friend named Elena, whom he identified among the ruins by a tattoo of a feather below her collar-bone and a silver ring on her finger. Nearby, Golub and the others found her husband and their two daughters, the older of whom had gone to the same school as his stepson, Danil. As the men worked, Sokolov suggested that they form a brigade to collect bodies across the city in exchange for food rations. One of his deputies added, "This is for those who don't shy away from the dead."

The group began daily patrols, with Golub as the foreman. Local residents reported the locations of bodies, which Golub and the others loaded into a minibus and took to the pedestrian bridge, where funeral workers from the other side of the river collected them. On busy days, they could transport as many as fifteen bodies before curfew. When they ran low on body bags, they carried corpses in blankets. Eventually, they were allowed to cross the river to dig the graves themselves. The burial ground was situated next to a cemetery, in a dense grove of pine trees. One day, it came under shelling, and everyone jumped into the dirt hollows to escape the barrage.

In late May, a local occupation official ordered Golub's brigade to collect the bodies of seventeen Ukrainian soldiers at the city morgue. Golub couldn't tell if they had been tortured, but a number of them had been shot in the head. The official said, "Bury them quickly in a common grave and move on." Golub complied. He took solace in the advice of an older volunteer in the unit: "Let's do this job and then forget about it like a terrible dream."

As summer approached, bodies started to decompose more quickly in the heat. In many cases, people had buried the dead in shallow graves in their yards and by the side of the road. A pair of dirt mounds appeared near a kindergarten in town. Dogs had taken to nibbling on the bodies that hadn't been buried deep enough. As the brigade's senior member, Golub was required to write down the names of the dead and to record their passport details. "I wasn't ready for this," he said.

It wasn't just the unpleasantness of the work that troubled him—the smell of rot and muck that stuck in your nostrils, the way the decomposing flesh broke apart in your hands—but also the notion that he was coöperating with the Russian occupation. Still, Golub told himself, someone had to collect the remains, and he needed to feed his family. He received his aid packages at the start of his shift, saving him hours in line; occasionally, he got an extra parcel. "None of this was normal," Golub said. "We understood that we couldn't just reject this task, but would have to continue, even if we didn't like it."

On September 6th, the Ukrainian military launched a counter-offensive across the Kharkiv region. Izyum was liberated four days later, ending a hundred and sixty-two days of occupation. Ukrainian soldiers and police officers soon came across the burial site where Golub's crew had brought the bodies. The pine grove was pockmarked with dirt mounds and small crosses for the dead, four hundred and forty-six in all. According to investigators and forensic specialists who carried out exhumations, most had died as a result of shelling and air strikes, but a sizable number showed signs of torture. "The world must see what the Russian Army left behind," Zelensky said, after a visit to Izyum on September 14th. "Another mass burial of killed people—children and adults, civilians and military." He made reference to other sites of Russian war crimes: "You saw Bucha. You saw Mariupol. Now it's Izyum."

I arrived in Izyum a couple of weeks later. The highway from Kharkiv was covered with a spray of charred metal and dotted with black burn marks. The mangled hull of a tank, its turret pointing lamely toward the sky, lay in a ditch by the side of the road. As Russian forces pulled out, they blew up substations and power lines, leaving Izyum once again without electricity or running water. Crowds occasionally gathered when Ukrainian aid deliveries arrived, or when word spread that pensions were available for withdrawal at the post office. Otherwise, the center of town was largely empty.

Before Russian forces captured the city, the mayor, Valeriy Marchenko, had managed to flee to Kharkiv. He returned the day after the city's liberation. As Ukrainian forces advanced on Izyum, someone had set fire to the municipal headquarters, forcing Marchenko and his staff to set up temporary offices in a building that housed the city's education department. I found him on the second floor, sitting behind a large wooden desk, wearing a heavy coat to keep warm.

Marchenko, who is fifty-two, with the boxy build of a linebacker and a baritone voice, was elected in 2015. I asked him about the locals who stayed and took up posts in the occupation. Of the eighty or so people who made up the prewar executive committee, the city's main governing body, Marchenko personally knew four who had worked for the occupation, including an aide who was featured in a propaganda video in which she thanked Russian troops for kicking out the Ukrainian "fascists." "More than anything, it reminded me of a circus," Marchenko said.

A few days earlier, the head of the city's water department, Mikhailo Zubko, who had agreed to work under occupation, repairing pipes and pumping stations, had come to see Marchenko at his office, telling him that he had been forced to coöperate. Russian soldiers came to his office, he said, put a bag over his head, and spent the next few hours beating him and threatening to shoot him in the knees and groin. Marchenko was unmoved. He told me that city officials had offered to help evacuate Zubko, and even sent a car for him, but he had chosen to remain in Izyum. "I understood perfectly well what would happen if I stayed," Marchenko said. "Either they would have killed me—the most likely option—or forced me to work for them and say how great Russia is."

When I tracked down Zubko, he remembered the story differently. He said that the offer of evacuation came only after the arrival of Russian forces, and that shortly before Marchenko left Izyum he had told Zubko, "Hang in there, and make sure the people have water." (Marchenko denies saying this.)

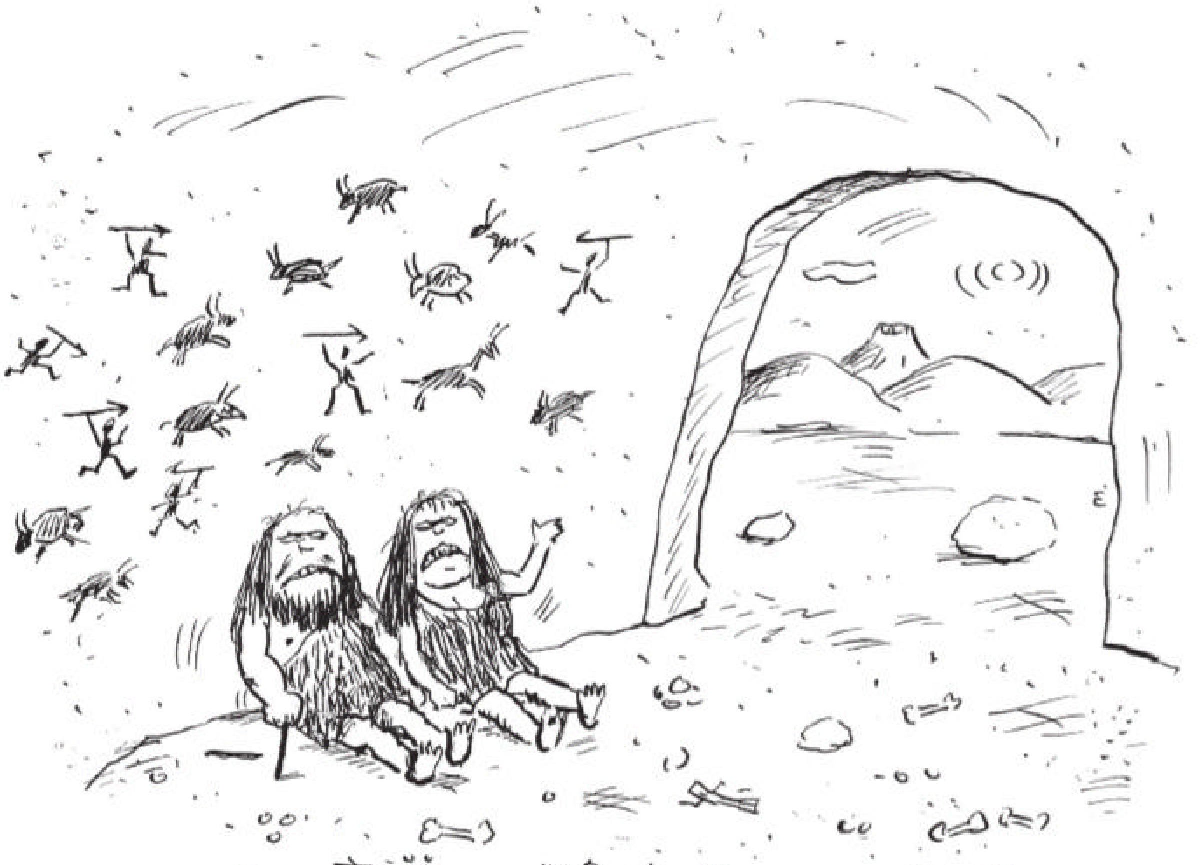
In the end, Zubko and the four members of the executive committee were suspended from their posts. "I myself don't know how we're supposed to live with such people," Marchenko said. "They served the Russians, passed them information, watched them rob and mistreat people—and now they should be allowed to carry on like nothing ever happened?"

Official details on how many people from Izyum and the surrounding area were questioned or detained on suspicion of collaboration are tightly guarded, but the number is almost certainly in the hundreds. Golub was among them. Two days after Izyum's liberation, a jeep full of men in camouflage, carrying Kalashnikovs and wearing the telltale blue armbands of Ukrainian forces, pulled up to his house. They forced their way inside and searched the rooms, turning over beds and drawers, asking Golub's wife, Iryna, where her husband was. He wasn't at home, she told them—he had gone to drop off a package of food for the parents of a friend. Two hours later, Golub returned. One of the armed men asked him whether he'd held a job during the occupation. Golub told them about the burials. "Then come with us," the soldier said. They put him in a car and drove off. "Gone, just like that," Iryna told me. "It's the last we saw him."

At the city's administration building, I found a childhood friend of Golub's, Maxim Strelnik, who was in charge of sports and youth programs. He left Izyum in March and had returned days before. Near the start of the occupation, when Strelnik was in a Ukrainian-controlled city elsewhere in the Kharkiv region, he called Golub and urged him to leave. Golub demurred. "He said he had to protect his warehouse full of goods," Strelnik recalled. "That if he left it would all be stolen or confiscated, and he'd be left with nothing."

Strelnik showed me a photograph that had been going around social media. Golub, stone-faced, wearing a black tank top, holds a Russian flag in his right hand. He's in a small group posing with Zakhar Prilepin, a Russian novelist turned politician who is a vocal supporter of the war. During the occupation, Prilepin opened his own humanitarian-aid center in Izyum, an outpost of Russia's imperial reach under the guise of a charity project. His organization boasted of supplying medicine for the city's hospital and rifle scopes for Russian troops. Strelnik was surprised to see his friend in such company. "What was Pavel doing there?" he asked. "We can only guess."

Later that day, I ran into one of the city's deputy mayors, Volodymyr Matsokin, who was constantly racing up and down the stairs of the administration building, fielding questions and requests from residents. Not long after Golub was



"I get it—you don't want anything to do with the art world. But then don't complain about being ignored."

A woman pushes groceries in a baby carriage in the center of Izyum. Ukrainian officials estimated that eighty per cent of residential

detained, Iryna had approached Matsokin and some of his colleagues outside the building. "So, tell me, can you breathe easy in this city?" she asked them. Matsokin looked on, confused. The city is clean, there are no bodies in the streets, there's no stench or disease, she said. "And do you know who is responsible for this? Pavel." She added, "And now you're back in office and he's in jail." Iryna said that Matsokin simply turned and walked away.

Before the war, Matsokin had been friendly with Golub. "We used to say 'Hello,' 'Goodbye,' 'How's it going?,' that sort of thing," Matsokin told me. "I can't say I ever peered into his soul." He stepped into an office and came out holding a document that was recovered when Ukrainian forces retook the city: a handwritten list of personnel for the occupation administration. Sokolov was at the top, followed by his deputies and those in charge of the legal and education departments. On the second page, listed as head of "housing and utility services," was Golub. "When we learned this story, we were all disappointed," Matsokin said. "We didn't expect this from him."

It wasn't Golub's work with the burials that got him into trouble, Matsokin went on: "If he was merely a volunteer who sorted through some ruins, that would be no big deal. But taking a post in this fake administration? That's a different step entirely." Matsokin also noted the photograph with Prilepin. "And, excuse me, you should understand under whose flag you're standing."

In Kharkiv, the capital of the region, I met with Andriy Kravchenko, a prosecutor who works with Ukraine's security service, the S.B.U., in identifying and charging suspected collaborators in newly liberated territories. He walked me through the Ukrainian criminal code for Article 111(1), the law governing collaboration, which Zelensky enacted in mid-

buildings in the city were damaged or destroyed.

March. "In general, collaboration is defined as any purposeful act that harms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our state," Kravchenko said.

In practice, that can mean many things. The most obvious cases are those in which a person took up arms against Ukrainian forces or was involved in spying or sabotage to aid the Russian war effort. But assessing culpability can get murky at the level of local governance. "We're looking for people who worked for the benefit of the Russian occupation," Kravchenko told me. "But does that apply to a welder or carpenter who maintained buildings or equipment for the occupiers? Or people responsible for critical infrastructure?" There wasn't an easy answer or policy, he said.

A further complication embedded in Ukraine's law on collaboration is the question of motive. "Was a person moved to act out of personal belief or under the barrel of a gun?" Kravchenko said. "The first would be a crime, the second not." In Izyum, government workers stopped receiving their Ukrainian salaries in March. Those who agreed to work for the Russian-backed administration often point to the unforgiving financial reality of occupation. "We have so many of these borderline situations, where it is hard for an investigator to prove not merely collaboration but criminal collaboration," Kravchenko said. "It requires painstaking work." He told me that it will likely take years for all the trials stemming from months of occupation to make their way through the courts. "But, believe me," he added, "every case will be looked into. No one should sleep too comfortably."

One morning, in Izyum, I spoke with Denys Shokun, a deputy chief of police. He and other officers had been combing through records left behind by the occupying authorities to search for suspected collaborators. Any suspects they found were brought to "filtration" centers set up in some of the town's municipal buildings. The process shares a name with the fearsome practice used by the Russian military to detain civilians en masse and hunt for military veterans, so-called Ukrainian nationalists, or anyone else they deem suspicious. In the Ukrainian version, investigators from the police and the S.B.U. check a person's statements against witness accounts, social-media posts, and Russian documents. If the evidence appears sufficient for a criminal proceeding, investigators pass the case to prosecutors, who, in turn, decide whether to file charges in court. "We aren't orcs," Shokun said, using the common term in Ukraine to describe the Russian invaders. "We act in accordance with the law."

Sokolov, the head of the occupation administration, had disappeared, along with his deputy and the chief of the occupation police force, presumably fleeing to Russia. That left collaborators of more middling rank—municipal workers, schoolteachers, a smattering of pro-Russian locals—whose guilt was often hard to prove. "We understand that some people worked purely in exchange for humanitarian rations," Shokun said. "Or doctors at the hospital who took the Hippocratic oath to save people." During the occupation, doctors treated anyone who showed up in need of help, whether that person was a local hit by shrapnel from Russian shelling or a Russian soldier injured in fighting the Ukrainian Army. In May, Russian troops shot and killed a forensic pathologist on the grounds of the hospital after he refused to give up his car, making the cost of resistance terrifyingly clear.

Most of the cases Shokun was working on involved residents who directly aided the Russian invasion force. A local pro-Russian politician was charged, in absentia, for giving directions to the Russian Army as it approached Izyum. Another man had pointed out Ukrainian troop positions and used his car to deliver munitions to Russian forces. At least ten cases had been opened against former members of the occupying "people's militia," including several who had previously served in Izyum's police force. Shokun, who had left town before the arrival of Russian troops, said, "I try not to judge people. I wasn't here living under this occupation. But crossing over to the other side to serve them? We took an oath, and they violated it."

The largest category of collaborators, though, would likely never face any legal action: people who may have had some contact or relationship with the occupation authorities, but not at a level that made them persons of interest for Ukrainian investigators. They might have shown up in the crowd at events organized by the Russian military, like the celebration, on May 9th, of the Soviet Union's victory in the Second World War, or sent their children to a summer camp in Russia. At most, such people now faced suspicion and ostracism. "In a city the size of Izyum, where everyone knows one another, legal responsibility isn't necessarily the most terrible thing," Matsokin, the deputy mayor, told me. "Disgust, contempt, the desire of your neighbor to spit in your face—all of that can be much worse."

Before the war, Mikhailo Dzhos, who is fifty-six, worked in a boiler room that supplied hot water to a group of apartment buildings in Izyum. In the days after Russia's invasion, he showed up at the local headquarters of the Territorial Defense Forces, a volunteer military corps, only to be told that there were no weapons left. Three days later, the Territorial Defense Forces pulled out entirely. Not long afterward, Russian soldiers set up a base in the school behind Dzhos's house. A Russian checkpoint appeared at the end of the road; soldiers dug a trench across the street, and several of them crouched inside, day and night, a machine gun jutting out from behind the dirt.

One of Dzhos's neighbors, Victoria Sidorova, seemed to welcome the arrival of the Russian Army. Sidorova, who is sixty-one, is originally from Lysychansk, a city in the Luhansk region that was briefly occupied by pro-Russian forces in 2014 and captured again last summer. After Izyum's occupation, Dzhos said, he saw her paying visits to the soldiers at the checkpoint, then announcing to anyone who could hear, "Ukraine never existed. We were always part of one great Russia." He also recalled her saying, of the Russian troops, "They are at home now. They've come to stay."

On April 7th, Russian soldiers took Dzhos and a dozen other men to a nearby courtyard. One held a knife to Dzhos's ribs while asking questions about the location of Territorial Defense bases. Dzhos said that he knew nothing about it. An hour later, they let him go. On his way home, he passed Sidorova in the street, standing with a group of Russian soldiers. It looked to Dzhos as though she was pointing at him.

Later that spring, a Russian officer visited Dzhos's house and asked him a series of questions about his age, his job, his salary. As Dzhos answered, the officer appeared confused about why Dzhos had been marked for questioning in the first place. He stopped Dzhos, saying, "Excuse me, do you happen to have enemies here?" Dzhos told him he had an erratic neighbor. "Ah," the officer replied, and got up to leave. "Now I understand." Dzhos told me, "I knew then that she was saying things about me everywhere she went."

A few weeks later, a Russian military jeep pulled up to Dzhos's house. Troops searched his yard with a metal detector; one claimed to find a Ukrainian Army uniform buried in the ground. They threw Dzhos into the jeep and drove him to a nearby house that they had been using as their quarters. Dzhos was shoved into the cellar, his hands bound. His captors asked where Ukrainian soldiers were hiding and where they had buried their guns. They punctuated their questions with blows to Dzhos's temple and his torso. He felt one of his ribs crack. Then he was lifted off the floor; someone pinched his nose and held his head back. A stream of water poured over him, instantly making him feel as if he were drowning. They were waterboarding him. Dzhos told me, "I panicked, tried to break free, screaming, 'What do you want to hear from me?'"

The next morning, the soldiers came back into the cellar. "We're taking you to the Chechens," one of them said. "They like the ones who aren't talkative." The Chechens were based in another house whose owners had left Izyum at the start of the war. One of them poked Dzhos's broken rib, then told another soldier to "bring out the spider." The spider, Dzhos soon saw, was a box that contained a hand crank and some electrical wires. The Chechen fastened the wires around Dzhos's ankles. Flashes of pain raced through his limbs like a lightning storm. "Either speak up or die," the Chechen said. "Your heart won't last." He added, "You won't be the only one we've buried." The torture continued for several hours.

Finally, the Chechen told Dzhos that, because he was being so stubborn, they would take him to a field and shoot him. Dzhos was delirious. "Let's go, then," he said. Russian soldiers put a black hood over his head, and wrapped it tightly with duct tape. They pushed him into the back seat of a car, tossing in two shovels after him. Dzhos felt a barrel squeeze against his temple. "You're toast," one of the soldiers said, cocking the pistol. Then, a moment later, the soldier's voice shifted in tone: "You'll live, but don't say what happened to you or we'll kill your whole family." Before letting Dzhos go, the soldier added, "By the way, I forgot to tell you: hello from your neighbor."

A couple of weeks later, Izyum was liberated. Sidorova is still at home, and Dzhos occasionally passes her in the street. "How can she look at me with a smirk?" he said. "I don't understand it." At one point, he reached under the kitchen table and pulled out the black hood wrapped in duct tape, a drooping mask laden with quiet horror. Dzhos has tried to let the events of last summer fade away, to find comfort in tending his garden and working on his car. But then, in the most unexpected moments, feelings of rage rush in. "When I'm overwhelmed by my emotions, I feel like I could kill her," he told me. "But I'm restraining myself." One way or another, he said, "I would like her to bear responsibility for my suffering."

But what should that mean? As I made my way to Sidorova's house, I spotted the trench left by Russian soldiers. At the gate, I called out to ask if anyone was home. A few moments later, Sidorova, a slight woman wearing a woollen sweater, stepped into the yard. She seemed to expect my questions about Dzhos. "We've had a hostile relationship for a long time," she said, narrating a long saga of arguments with Dzhos and his wife, including a time when their Rottweiler nearly bit her. "It got to the point where we don't even say hello. I don't look in their direction, and they don't look in mine. But, with the war, things went entirely crazy."

Sidorova told me that she is a practicing Jehovah's Witness, and that she had been cordial with the Russian troops for her own safety, not out of any sense of political loyalties. "I'm not waiting for the Russian World," she said, referring to the imperial idea popular among Russian nationalists. "I'm waiting for Armageddon, when God will restore order." She was adamant that she didn't do anything to instigate Dzhos's arrest. "No, of course not, I didn't give the Russians any information," she told me. "I tried my best not to get involved."

After Izyum was liberated, investigators twice came to speak with her. On their third visit, she was detained. Sidorova described seeing her neighbors lining the road, watching her being led away. "I told them, 'It's not me,'" she said. "'Look for the guilty somewhere else. This is all some kind of nonsense.'" Sidorova described being driven to a school north of town that had been turned into a detention facility. She handed over her phone and her personal identification and was left alone for the better part of two days. Finally, she was briefly questioned and then released. "I believe this matter has been closed," she told me. As for Dzhos and the rest of her neighbors, she went on, "I don't think there can be any relations after this. They've ganged up on me. But what can I prove? It's just my word against theirs."

Farther down the road, I came to the

Elena Tur, who was accused by her neighbors of collaborating with the Russians, at her home in Izyum.

house of Iryna Slabospytska, an optometrist in her forties. In September, a contingent of Ukrainian troops had come to the neighborhood looking for a man who, during the occupation, distributed Russian humanitarian aid to those who were running out of food. He was on a list of suspected collaborators. Slabospytska defended him and urged the troops to arrest Sidorova instead. "I told the soldiers to leave this one alone—I'll show them the one who really did something foul," she told me. She used a Russian-language expression to describe Sidorova's profile around the neighborhood these days: "Quieter than water, lower than grass." Sidorova may never face legal sanction, Slabospytska went on, but her actions carry consequences all the same. "She is an outcast," Slabospytska said. "At least she committed this treachery openly, so we know the enemy's face. Lots of people did similar things but quietly."

Izyum was the site of some of the fiercest fighting of the Second World War. In the spring of 1942, in a catastrophic loss for the Red Army, the German Wehrmacht surrounded and killed thousands of Soviet troops near the city, which fell under Nazi occupation for the next seven months. Throughout the region, German forces rounded up and executed Jews and hunted down suspected Soviet saboteurs. Tens of thousands more Ukrainians died of hunger, cold, and disease; nearly as many were removed from their homes and shipped to Germany as slave workers. One such person, a teen-ager named Borys Romanchenko, was sent from Ukraine to labor in a German coal mine, before being interned in the concentration camps in Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen. He was freed after the war and moved to Kharkiv, where, last March, at the age of ninety-six, he was killed in his apartment by a Russian rocket attack.

At certain points in the Second World War, some Ukrainian nationalists viewed the German military as situational allies in the fight against Soviet power; at others, they ended up targeted by Nazi forces. In 1942, for example, Volodymyr Bahazii, the *Bürgermeister* of Kyiv, as German-installed mayors were called, was shot by the Nazis at Babyn Yar. Meanwhile, German occupiers kept intact many local institutions—the postal service, collective farms, the tractor depot—which were staffed by their prewar employees. "It was impossible not to come in contact with the occupation regime," the historian Franziska Exeler writes in "Ghosts of War," "and willingly or unwillingly, some people became complicit or entangled in Nazi crimes."

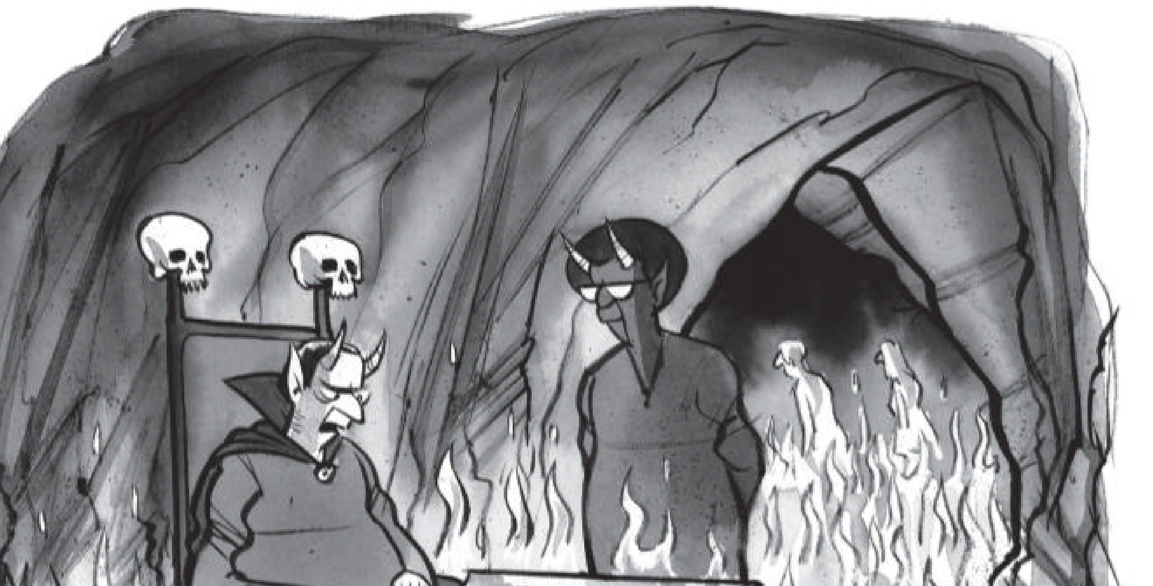
Once the Kharkiv region was liberated, on February 5, 1943, the Soviet state moved in to reëstablish its authority and punish those "servants of the Germans," as a top Communist official called them. Stalin regarded the war as a "test that revealed people's true loyalties," Exeler writes, and "showed no understanding for the moral gray zones of occupation." Across the Soviet expanse, several hundred thousand citizens were prosecuted for their actions under German occupation. Many village heads who coöperated with the Germans were simply shot by Red Army troops as they swept through the Kharkiv region.

Elsewhere in Europe, sorting through questions of guilt and responsibility—not only for the most ghastly crimes of Fascism but also for more humdrum, day-to-day coöperation—was part of the larger project of forging a new sense of national identity and unity. "If postwar governments' legitimacy rested merely on their military victory over Fascism, how were they better than wartime Fascist regimes themselves?" Tony Judt writes in "Postwar." The Nazi and the Allied armies had clashed not only as duelling military forces but as representatives of opposing models of civilization. In the aftermath, the victors would have to settle whose cause was just; those who lent their energies to the unjust side would have to face punishment.

This process could be scattershot and inconsistent, rife with excesses in one moment and inexplicably lenient the next. The Norwegian state, for example, put the entirety of the country's pro-Nazi movement on trial, prosecuting tens of thousands of people at once; the children fathered by German soldiers were stigmatized, committed to psychiatric hospitals, even deported. In France, on the other hand, trials were far less common. "Since the state itself was the chief collaborator, it seemed harsh and more than a little divisive to charge lowly citizens with the same crime," Judt writes. Notably, three of the four judges deciding French collaboration cases had themselves served the Vichy regime.

In Poland, collaborators and partisans were often one and the same. The Polish-Canadian historian Jan Grabowski writes of one police officer, Władysław Królik, who, in November, 1943, tracked down a number of Jewish families in hiding near the village of Gałki. He and his fellow-officers took them into the woods and shot them. And yet, throughout his service, Królik also carried out secret reconnaissance and intelligence missions for the Polish Home Army, the country's main resistance movement. When he was put on trial for war crimes, in the early nineteen-fifties, his neighbors asked for leniency, sending letters to the court citing his partisan activity. Królik was released after seven years.

Outside the courtroom, a spasm of vigilante violence erupted against those suspected of having collaborated with the Nazis. Italy saw the lynching of more than fifteen thousand people; in France, some ten thousand were killed by roving gangs of resistance fighters. Frenchwomen accused of "horizontal collaboration" with German soldiers had their heads shaved and were forcibly marched around towns and villages to be harangued and mocked. "The popularity of the charge and the vindictive pleasure taken in the punishment is a reminder that for men and women alike the occupation was experienced above all as a humiliation," Judt writes. Still, far more wartime collaborators escaped justice than faced it: "The majority of people in the lands recently occupied by the Germans were more interested in putting uncomfortable or unpleasant memories behind them and getting on with their fractured lives."



"The language in this contract is wordy and indirect, and uses unnecessary technical words and phrases. I'm very impressed."

In Izyum this fall, the lingering trauma of occupation left many residents with conflicting emotions. Relief and gratitude for the city's liberation commingled with a feeling of grievance and offense, that the relatively well-off and well-connected had managed to flee. It wasn't unheard-of for residents to lash out at their liberators. When I asked a Ukrainian soldier stationed outside the administration building about loyalties in the city, he said, "Fifty-fifty." He told me that he left his car parked on the street overnight and in the morning its tires had been punctured.

One evening, I came across a small group in a courtyard cooking dinner on an open flame. Elena Evmenova, the local *kvartalnaya*, was ladling out bowls of food for her neighbors. A *kvartalnaya* is a position akin to a neighborhood superintendent; during occupation, Russian authorities tasked people in this role with distributing humanitarian aid and compiling lists of who remained. A hundred and seventy-three people had fallen under Evmenova's care, she told me: "We had to find a way to survive." A Russian military station was set up at Izyum's S.B.U. headquarters, not far from her building. Soldiers would bring out leftover food to share. "Yes, we ate Russian canned beef," Evmenova said. "What were we supposed to do, die of hunger?"

Evmenova saw the position of someone like Marchenko, the city's mayor, who had evacuated in the spring, as hypocritical and unfeeling. A small crowd had assembled around us in the courtyard, and some of its members murmured in agreement. "He abandoned us, ran away like a rat, and judges us because we didn't do the same," she said. "We lived through something that not many people would be able to bear, and now they call us collaborators?"

The next day, I drove to a neighborhood of private homes on a hill in the eastern outskirts of town, where residents had recently accused their *kvartalnaya*, a seventy-three-year-old named Elena Tur, of collaboration. By most accounts, Tur, who had been *kvartalnaya* for twenty-five years, had long lorded her small degree of authority over her neighbors. Petro Koptev moved to Izyum four years ago from Toretsk, in the Donbas, and bought a plot of land beside Tur's, where he raised cows, chickens, and pigs. As Koptev relayed, Tur laid out her rules from the beginning: " 'Just make sure I never run out of milk or meat and you won't have any problems.' " He never gave her anything, which he suspected made Tur furious.

According to Tur's neighbors, her penchant for petty imperiousness grew into something more menacing with the arrival of Russian troops. She embraced the occupation, boasting of her ties to Shere Khan, the military commander. "She knew all the bosses," Koptev told me, and alleged that Tur used her connections to gain concessions for herself and to take punitive actions against her neighbors. "She told everyone quite clearly, 'You start acting too clever, I'll see that you end up in a cellar.' "

One day in August, a resident in her fifties named Olga Solomka complained to Tur that the bread she was handing out, which was supposed to be fresh, was stale. Two days later, Solomka was detained by Russian soldiers and taken to a police station for questioning. She was locked in a cell, where, she said, guards showed her a complaint from Tur instructing them to "bury" her. The next morning, Solomka was released. "Frankly, she's dead to me," Solomka said of Tur. "God is her judge."

Ukrainian law allows constituents to remove their *kvartalnaya* through a majority vote. A week after Izyum's liberation, a hundred or so residents gathered by a well on Cosmonauts Street and overwhelmingly voted to replace Tur with Natalia Solodovnik, a forty-one-year-old worker at a nearby bread factory. "I wish Elena Petrovna prudence and health," Solodovnik told me, using Tur's patronymic. "But everyone has their own boiling point." The mayor's office was notified of the result, ending Tur's reign. "People see that the courts and law enforcement aren't always so quick to deal with those who coöperated with the occupiers," Matsokin, the deputy mayor, said. "But, by exercising their democratic right, they can nonetheless demonstrate their attitude toward such people." He compared the process to a "healthy organism fighting off infection."

When I pulled up to Tur's house, I found her sitting on a wooden bench under a lilac tree. She was dressed in a floral robe, her white hair combed back. She insisted that she had only wanted the best for her neighbors. "Call them occupants," she said of the Russian soldiers in Izyum. "But they handed out food, and not a single person in my neighborhood died of hunger." She called Koptev's claim that she had tried to extort him "absurd"; Solomka was detained, she said, for public drunkenness; and she had no personal relationship with Shere Khan. "He asked, in a very calm, cultured way, for help cleaning up the city, putting things in order," she said. In exchange, Tur told me, she asked for his help in providing such essentials as bread and milk. "For this I don't consider myself a criminal," she said. Her only regret was acting on behalf of her neighbors at all. "Because, no matter what, people turned out ungrateful."

Perhaps no aspect of life under occupation in Izyum was more fraught than education. The Russian invasion was predicated on a chauvinistic reading of history, in which Ukraine didn't exist but, rather, was assembled from the borderlands of larger empires. It was the Russian state, whether in the form of the tsar or the Communist Party, that gave Ukraine its place in the world—an ideology that had implications for the teaching of history, language, and literature. Vladimir Putin made clear that schoolchildren in territories occupied by Russia should be taught that Russia and Ukraine were historically united, and that Ukraine has no legitimate claim to independence. In Izyum, at least two school principals and dozens of teachers agreed to return to the classroom and teach the Russian state program.

Oleksii Bezkorovainy, the head of Izyum's education department, evacuated in the spring, returning days after Ukrainian forces retook the city. "Those who went back to teaching all have the same story, like a carbon copy," he said. " 'We had nothing to eat, we were forced, we felt sorry for the children.' " But the majority of teachers in Izyum, Bezkorovainy noted, refused to work under the Russian flag. Many were harassed repeatedly; some were threatened. "They say, 'We endured six months of occupation, and the ones who worked for the Russians treated us like second class,' " he said. " 'Now we should go back to school under equal conditions? Shoulder to shoulder?' I don't know how to answer these people, because they acted like true patriots."

During my time in Izyum, one name came up more than any other: Lubov Gozha, the director of School No. 2. Gozha, who is fifty-three, had been its director for seven years. School No. 2 had a long history: in the Soviet era, it was Izyum's only school with Ukrainian-language instruction, and through the years it became known as a center of Ukrainian culture and identity. Gozha kept up the tradition, wearing a *vyshyvanka*, an embroidered Ukrainian folk shirt, on the first day of classes every year, and setting up a small exhibit on the school grounds with handmade artifacts that reflected Ukrainian history and customs. A few years ago, an alum who had joined the Ukrainian Army was killed in the Donbas war; Gozha put up a memorial plaque near the entrance and held an annual ceremony to commemorate him and other veterans. "We would stand next to each other singing the Ukrainian anthem, and I could see she had tears in her eyes," Bezkorovainy said.

That is what made the scene that took place on August 16th all the more unexpected. In a large hall at Izyum's House of Culture, Gozha stood onstage, surrounded by Sokolov and other occupation officials, handing out Russian-issued diplomas to several dozen local high-school students. "Congratulations from the bottom of our hearts," Gozha was quoted as saying to the assembled students and families, in the occupation paper *Kharkiv-Z*. "We are counting on you to raise up our city and help in its stable development." The article also noted that Gozha's school was among the first in Izyum to be accredited by Russian education authorities. "It's strange and painful that she sold herself out like

FOURTH QUARTER, FOUR MINUTES ON THE CLOCK. ALL TIED UP, AND THEY'RE OFF! WILL THE JOHNSONS BEAT THE TRAFFIC?!
HOME
AWAY
14
14
4TH QUARTER
4:00
SCOREBOARD
58
58
SARAH

• •

this," Bezkorovainy told me. "I guess I'm not as good a judge of people as I thought."

I found Gozha at her home, in a troubled state, a coil of nerves and fright. She was sitting at a folding table in her yard, barely able to speak, her hands shaking. Her husband, Anatoly, was trying to tend to her, but he, too, seemed in a state of shock; he'd start to tell a story, then trail off, or interrupt himself to rub tears from his eyes. It has been like this for weeks, Anatoly said. He pointed to a line of pill bottles on the table. "Thank God we found these," he told me. "She was in some faraway place, lying there like a cutlet. I thought she was done for."

Gozha began to tell me of her years at School No. 2. "It was my whole life," she said. "I was devoted to the school, and still am." Her house is on the edge of town, and had ended up between Ukrainian and Russian troop positions. The booms were loud and frequent. A shell landed right in the garden, blowing out the windows of the house; another slammed through the front gate. Anatoly's mother, who is eighty-three, lives nearby and is virtually bedridden. It would have been impossible to evacuate her. So Lubov and Anatoly spent most of their time in the cellar, which fit only an old mattress and shelves of pickled vegetables. "I would come up to wash myself, and then hear a blast, and Anatoly telling me, 'Luba, get down!'" She added, "I can't describe the fear."

In July, a group of Russian soldiers, led by a former accountant in the city administration named Yulia Babaevskaya, who had taken up the post of education director, showed up at the house and instructed Gozha to return to work. She refused. A few weeks later, they came back; Gozha got the feeling that saying no a second time wasn't an option. "They had guns," she told me. "They didn't so much pose a question but simply said this was how things would be." She went back to school, but said that she mainly focussed on routine matters: cleaning the yard, fixing the windows, stocking supplies. Russian soldiers were everywhere. Gozha referred to their presence as "control"—"control" at school, "control" at home, "control" around town. Some mornings, she said, she would sit frozen on her couch, unable to get up and go to work, and then, by eleven in the morning, "control" would come looking for her. Even when she complied, the soldiers taunted her. " 'Oh, so you're the big Ukrainian patriot, from the pro-Ukrainian school,' " Gozha recalled them saying.

Gozha understood that it was impossible to avoid questions of ideology and loyalty. Earlier in her career, she had taught Ukrainian geography, showing students a map of the country. Crimea, the Donbas, Izyum—all of that was and is Ukraine, she said. "And now you should say something different? If you remain a patriot, then no, you can't."

But Gozha felt that she didn't have a choice. "You either do as they say or they can kill you," she said. "It's hard to call that comfortable." At a certain point, Babaevskaya instructed Gozha to clear out the Ukrainian-language literature from the school's library. "I told them I won't do any such thing," she said. By late August, she had stopped showing up at the school, and Russian soldiers largely left her alone. Less than two weeks later, Izyum was liberated and they were gone. Many people in town had seen a photograph of her at the graduation ceremony. Her husband began receiving nasty text messages, calling her a collaborator. Her contract, along with those of many other teachers who coöperated with the occupation authorities, was suspended. "So I'm a traitor?" Gozha asked. "Whom did I betray? My home? My mother? It feels like I'm guilty for the fact that I survived." In the days after Izyum's liberation, an armed unit of investigators came to Gozha's home, blindfolded her, and drove her away for an interrogation. "At first, I thought they were going to shoot me," she said. She was eventually released, and no charges have been filed. "Still I'm scared," she told me. "I can't sleep. I scream at night, you can't believe."

Several former students and parents have stopped by to offer words of encouragement. Recently, a man who graduated from School No. 2 and is now fighting in the Ukrainian Army greeted her warmly in the street. But Gozha has the feeling that many of her former colleagues, not to mention a sizable number of people around Izyum, would prefer it if she simply left town. "I love Ukraine—I haven't changed at all," she told me. “And so it pains me that some people have changed how they feel about me.” One thing was clear, she added: “There’s no future for me here.”

When Golub was being detained, one of the Ukrainian soldiers told Iryna they would bring him back that same evening. In the car, the soldiers covered Golub’s head with a hood and tied his hands. They came to a stop by the river, where Golub was forced out. “Why is this one so clean?” a voice asked. Fists landed on his legs and his torso. He was then put onto a bus, which drove around Izyum for an hour, stopping occasionally to pick up more people—two dozen suspected collaborators, Golub eventually learned.

That evening, they pulled up to a prison near the city of Pervomaiskyi, seventy miles from Izyum. Golub and the other detainees were thrown on the floor, their hands still bound. Two days later, he was taken down the hall for an interrogation. One S.B.U. officer told him, “If you don’t want to end up being shot or being made to walk across a minefield, make sure to tell us everything so that we really believe it.”

Golub insisted that he had told his interrogators the whole story: Sokolov’s offer, collecting bodies from the streets, the burials at the mass gravesite. During the summer, Golub went on, the occupation authorities asked his brigade to take part in reconstruction works and to clear an area for a new sewage pipe. Golub said that Sokolov offered him the post as head of housing and utility services for occupied Izyum—the job I saw listed in the personnel file left behind by Russian forces—but he declined the offer. “I’ve never done this kind of work,” he told them.

He also provided an explanation for the photograph with Prilepin. One day, a friend invited him to take part in a meeting to discuss sports programming. When he showed up, a small crowd of people was gathered around a man dressed in a khaki shirt and white sneakers—only later did he learn that this was Prilepin. A Russian soldier handed him a flag and told him where to stand. “His tone was basically ‘You have a family, so do this quickly and fuck off,’ ” Golub said. “But, honestly, when people with guns are standing around, you don’t have the strong desire to think a lot about what they’re saying and why.” Afterward, Golub told me, he tried to limit his contact with the occupation authorities. “I basically disowned them,” he said. By July, he was done clearing bodies. He set up a small stall at the city’s outdoor market to sell some of his remaining inventory of cell-phone accessories.

When the interrogation was over, Golub was taken to a cell where thirty other people suspected of collaboration were being held. Some of them described how they had joined the Russian-installed police force in their towns; others had willfully led Russian troops to Ukrainian military veterans. One man told Golub that he’d identified the homes of well-off families who had fled so that the Russians could help themselves to whatever remained.

There were also more ambiguous cases. Golub recognized an acquaintance from Izyum who had a large warehouse in town. Russian soldiers had forced him to lend them the space to store humanitarian aid. This had landed him in trouble, but after a month he was freed. The guards treated everyone in the cell the same, Golub told me. “They would tell us, ‘You are scum, you are traitors, sit there and be quiet.’ ”

One day, an S.B.U. officer confided to Golub that he would be set free in the next day or two. “Don’t be afraid, all questions have been answered,” he said. But, the officer went on, Golub was considered a witness to Russian war crimes and was being held for his own protection. “Excuse me, but witnesses are treated better than this,” Golub said. The officer apologized, and explained that, in wartime, the prison was one of the few places where so many people could be housed and processed at once. Then he made a request: Would Golub be willing to speak to Ukrainian journalists about his burial work once he was back home? Golub agreed. Later that day, he was driven to Izyum, where he gave an on-camera interview at the gravesite in the forest.

He thought his ordeal was over. But afterward S.B.U. operatives told Golub that they had received an order to take him back into custody, and returned him to the prison in Pervomaiskyi, where he spent another four weeks. Golub lost fifty pounds; his joints ached from sleeping on the floor. He complained to the guards about severe pain in his abdomen, the result of a hernia he had developed while hauling rubble. After forty-two days in custody, he was transferred to a hospital in Kharkiv. As he was being led out, one of the guards said to him, “Just don’t tell anyone about your time here.” (An S.B.U. official told me that suspected collaborators like Golub often appeal to the agency for protection in a secure environment because they fear for their safety.)

Golub returned to Izyum last November. He went to his storeroom, only to discover that the lock had been broken and all his inventory, worth more than a hundred thousand dollars, was gone. The police showed little interest in the case; one day, Iryna asked some soldiers from a Territorial Defense unit about Golub’s ransacked space. “That’s the guy who coöperated with Russians,” one of them said.

His friends are mostly supportive. Strelnik, from the city’s administration office, said, “I believe him.” He went on, “It’s an instructive case. We thought a person might have been a collaborator, but it looks like he was under pressure, forced to take part.” Matsokin, the deputy mayor, wasn’t so sure: “It’s not like this person was tied up and had no choice.” Golub had heard rumors that police officers in Izyum had discussed finding new charges to bring against him. “I was detained without any documents, and was released without any documents,” he told me. “Seeing as there’s nothing that says I’ve been officially cleared of all suspicion, what keeps them from detaining me again?”

Golub’s parents, who are in their fifties, ended up in Germany, part of a mass exodus of Ukrainians across Europe. After Golub’s release, his father, who uses a wheelchair, came to see him in Izyum. Men who are of fighting age are typically not permitted to leave Ukraine; Golub received special dispensation to accompany his father back to Germany. He has since taken a job in another European country, which he asked that I not disclose, where Iryna and Danil have joined him. During Izyum’s occupation, he said, “I imagined that our guys would come and I could finally exhale. Things turned out more complicated than that.” ♦

ANNALS OF ENTERTAINMENT

BALLAD OF THE OSCAR STREAKER

What happened to the man who ran across the screen naked in 1974?

BY MICHAEL SCHULMAN

Late in the evening on April 2, 1974, the forty-sixth Academy Awards had already secured their place in the history books. At ten years old, Tatum O'Neal had become the youngest person ever to win an Oscar, for "Paper Moon." Katharine Hepburn had attended the ceremony for the first time, to present an award. David Niven, sharing hosting duties with Burt Reynolds, Diana Ross, and John Huston, introduced Hepburn with the line "To conceal the identity of our next presenter has called for a security operation of truly royal proportions."

A little royalty—and a little decorum—was what the Academy desperately craved. As in recent years, with such surprise sideshows as the Best Picture envelope mixup ("Moonlight" or "La La Land"?) and Will Smith smacking Chris Rock, the Oscars of the early seventies had been bumpy: George C. Scott refusing his award for "Patton," Marlon Brando sending Sacheen Littlefeather to decline his for "The Godfather." When Niven introduced the final presenter, he said, "If one reads the newspapers or listens to the news, it is quite obvious that the whole world is having a nervous breakdown." But in Hollywood, he went on, "we turn out entertainment."

That was how Hollywood wanted to see itself: as the unifier of a country fractured by Vietnam and Watergate. Niven, a stiff-upper-lip charmer, could glide above America's political paroxysms, and he might have gone on talking were it not for his friend Elizabeth Taylor, whom he was introducing. "Hurry up, David," she had told him backstage. "Get me out of there fast." And so Niven moved on to introduce the Best Picture presenter, whom he called a "very important contributor to world entertainment, and someone quite likely—"

But before he could finish he was interrupted by a squall of screams. It took Niven a moment to realize what the commotion was. Glancing to his right, he saw a man with floppy brown hair and a bushy mustache, flashing a peace sign as he ran across the stage—naked.

The audience, which included Jack Nicholson, Liza Minnelli, Paul McCartney, and Groucho Marx, along with sixty-four million viewers at home, watched in disbelief. Pam Grier, who had been given the ceremonial job of "Oscar guardian," saw it all from backstage. "I was standing in the wings and saw this flash—I have great peripheral vision," she later told the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. Taylor, Grier said, was backstage fixing her hair: "When the streaker went across the stage, she just started laughing."

The man disappeared stage right, and the gasps turned to chatter. Niven did a double take as the orchestra struck up a jaunty tune. He adjusted his bow tie and shrugged. "Well, ladies and gentlemen," he said coolly. "That was almost bound to happen." As the crowd's murmuring gave way to tentative laughter, Niven rode the moment like a surfer. "But isn't it fascinating," he continued, "to think that probably the only laugh that man will ever get in his life is by stripping off and showing his shortcomings?"

The audience roared. Niven had taken a would-be nervous breakdown and turned it into entertainment. With that, he brought out Taylor to hand the final prize to "The Sting."

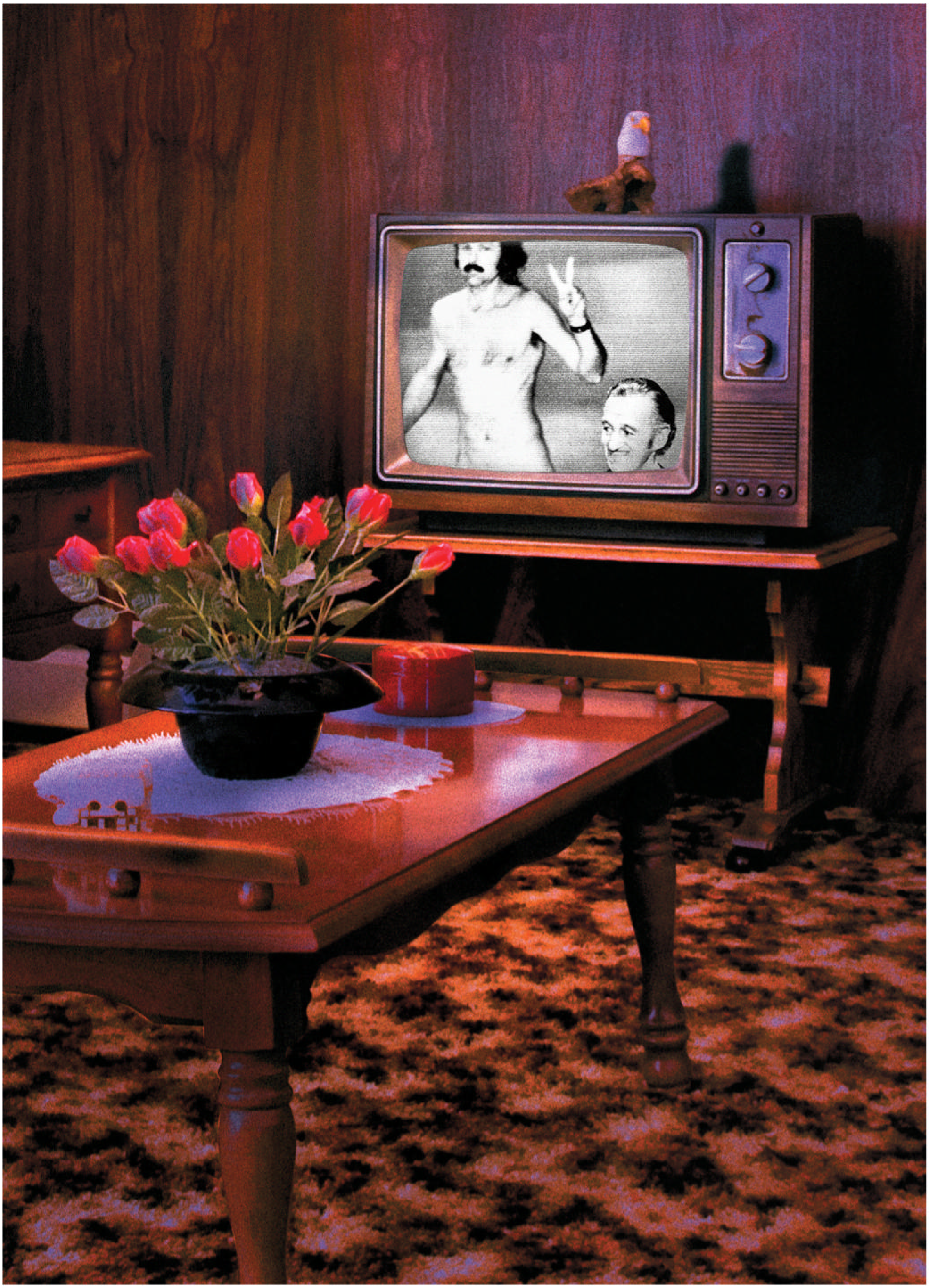
The streaker was taken not to the authorities but to the pressroom, where he appeared in a blue jumpsuit unzipped to the waist and posed alongside a jumbo Oscar. He identified himself as Robert Opel, an advertising man. What he didn't say was that he actually worked for the Los Angeles school system, and that he was gay. "It just occurred to me that it might be an educative thing to do," he said. "You know, people shouldn't be ashamed of being nude in public. Besides, it's a hell of a way to launch a career."

Nearly half a century later, the "Oscar streak" is remembered as a blip of seventies counterculture amid the Hollywood glitz. But who was Robert Opel, and why did he do what he did? Conspiracy theories surfaced immediately. Had Opel been a plant to get ratings? How had he circumvented the "security operation of truly royal proportions"? And how did Niven have such a well-crafted zinger ready?

Niven's crack that this was "almost bound to happen" was no exaggeration. About four months earlier, a Van Nuys housewife had run nude through the streets of the San Fernando Valley. *Time* reported on the "growing Los Angeles-area fad," and a d.j. at KMET set up a tip line that locals could call with "streaker alerts." By March, the trend had gone national. A streaker ran across a basketball court during halftime at a game between the University of Florida and the University of Alabama. In Lansing, a man wearing only boots and a ski mask darted through the Michigan House of Representatives. Nudists appeared on bicycles or floating with parachutes. At the University of Georgia, the student body set a record when fifteen hundred and forty-three people streaked across campus. As *Time* wrote, "Probably not since the days of the ancient Greeks have so many exposed so much to so many."

Psychologists theorized about the craze. Streaking was an irreverent attack on social mores, or an escape from the stresses of Watergate and inflation. Or it was a fun-house mirror of the guerrilla warfare in Vietnam: spontaneous, low-tech, and disruptive. Or maybe it was just a fun thing for college kids to do.

The idea that someone might streak



After the streaker sped by, David Niven was ready with a quip about the man "showing his shortcomings."

SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVEN ERRICO / GETTY (ROOM); AP (STREAKER)

ILLUSTRATION BY TYLER COMRIE

the Oscars had been inevitable enough that an alternate theory emerged: that the show's writers had pre-written a line on an "idiot card," to be used in the event of a streak, which was then held up for Niven. Years later, his son David Niven, Jr., posited that his father would have been "prepared with a line." But Niven's other son, Jamie, told me, "No, no. That was spontaneous." Watching at home in New York, Jamie had seen a flash of anger in his father's eyes, which reminded him of the look he had gotten when he brought home a bad report card. The incursion, he could tell, "pissed him off."

The show's producer, Jack Haley, Jr., was close with the Niven family, and Jamie later asked him if the streak was planned. "No way," Haley answered, adding, "David wouldn't have stood for that." The telecast's director, Marty Pasetta—who had to divert the cameras so as not to catch Opel's manhood onscreen—claimed that Niven had pre-written the line himself. "I imagine David Niven told Marty that, if somebody was going to streak the show, he had a line prepared," Pasetta's widow, Elise, told me.

Opel always maintained that he had acted alone. Days after the Oscars, he was flown to Philadelphia to appear on "The Mike Douglas Show," where he sat, wearing a cowboy hat, next to Bea Arthur. Douglas asked him, "Was this a setup?"

"The press keeps asking that," Opel replied. "Nobody believes that it wasn't set up."

Opel's version of events went like this: He had sneaked through the security checkpoint in his jumpsuit with a press pass that he had borrowed from a friend. Backstage, he acted cool, lending a hand to anyone who needed it. When the show started, he hid in the scenery and shed his jumpsuit. There were so many cables underfoot that he worried about getting electrocuted, but he stuck to his plan—to wait for the final envelope, for maximum drama. When the time came, he broke through the cyclorama.

The moment passed in a blur. "I expected that they would seize me," he told Douglas. But when he got to the other side of the stage everyone was too stunned to do anything. He circled back to where he'd left his clothes and got dressed. Just as two security guards were heading toward him, an Academy official intercepted him and brought him to the press. "I thought it was very interesting that Elizabeth Taylor could be flustered by the sight of a nude man in any context," Opel told the Los Angeles gay newspaper the *Advocate*, where he had been contributing as a man-on-the-street photographer.

Hollywood embraced its new overnight star—for a time. The manager Allan Carr, known for his blowout house parties in Benedict Canyon, hired Opel to appear at a party for Rudolf Nureyev. Carr wore a striped caftan; Opel wore a stiff collar and tie and nothing else. He streaked the party, then returned in a silver-and-black cape and bikini briefs, and announced that he was going into comedy, because "the possibilities as a streaker are very limited." A few days later, at Philadelphia's Café Erlanger, he made his standup début, in a (clothed) performance titled "Letting It All Hang Out." In the middle of his set—described by one reviewer as a "rambling string of observations"—a man wearing only an earring walked onstage and gave him a kiss. The streaker had been streaked.

Opel told Mike Douglas that the ultimate streak would be to run through a White House press conference while the President was saying, "I have nothing to hide." ("You wouldn't dare!" Bea Arthur brayed.) Six years after Andy Warhol made his fifteen-minutes-of-fame prophecy, and decades before "going viral" entered the lexicon, Opel epitomized both. He was famous for being shameless, and had found the perfect foil in Niven, whose dry deadpan matched Opel's bawdy exhibitionism. Hollywood had been trying for years to keep up with the counterculture, and now it had crashed the town's most sacred ritual.

Even as Opel's fifteen minutes ticked down, his quest for exposure was just getting started. The Oscars were not his first or his last brush with history, and five years later he'd be dead.

"There is a five-month slowdown. You are still on the fastest route. You will arrive next year."

Robert Oppel, as his name was originally spelled, was born in 1939 and raised in an "intact, Catholic, loving, middle-class family," his younger sister, Mary, recalled. As a child, he barely survived scarlet fever. His mother, Hilda, worked as a bank teller and drove church car pools. His father, Robert, Sr., worked as a surveyor for a New Jersey township, and eventually moved the family to Kentucky, where he worked for the Atomic Energy Commission.

Robert joined the Boy Scouts and obtained the rank of Eagle Scout and membership in the Order of the Arrow. (Years later, because of the organization's attitude toward homosexual boys, he returned his medal.) In high school in Pittsburgh, where the Oppels finally settled, Robert joined the debate team, which won so many contests that the school had to buy a bigger trophy case. His family assumed that he would go into politics. At his freshman orientation at Providence College, in Rhode Island, where he double-majored in English and political science, he whispered to his sister, "Mary, see that boy onstage? He's the president of the student body, and in four years that will be me." He was right.

But his ambition was cut short by his sexuality. After getting a master's degree in linguistics, he joined the Peace Corps and studied Thai. Just before his scheduled departure for Thailand, he was told that he could not go, because he "couldn't get along well with others," according to Mary. "We knew this was a horrible lie," she said. "Somehow they determined he was homosexual, and he was denied the opportunity to represent his country and teach English to the Thai people."

Defeated, he left for California, which he thought would be more accepting, and dropped a "p" from his last name. In 1966, he was hired as a speechwriter for Ronald Reagan in his gubernatorial campaign. As the law-and-order candidate, Reagan opposed the rise of campus radicalism. There was dissension among the campaign's writers, and "it was leaked to the news media that Reagan had homosexuals on his staff," Mary said. "Bob lost his job."

Had he not been fired for being who he was, he might have continued down a conservative path. Instead, Opel transformed into a hippie prankster, a misfit child of the sexual revolution. After the Stonewall riots, in 1969, being gay was no longer a mark of shame but a movement, one that gave Opel a place in the world. In the early seventies, he did a regular photo feature for the *Advocate* called "Around Town . . . by Robert Opel." He'd snap a long-haired hitchhiker in snug bell-bottoms, or a guy getting a lion tattoo on his ass, or a hippie lounging naked under the Hollywood sign. "I feel closer to being able to accept myself for who I am—no pretense, no bullshit, a lot less fear," he wrote to his sister.

By early 1974, as he plotted his Oscar streak, he was working as a curriculum consultant for the L.A. school district, helping to develop a new method of teaching English to foreign students. "There is a revolution going on in linguistics education," he told the Van Nuys *Valley News*, three weeks before the Academy Awards. The day after his streak, the school district informed him by letter, "Your services will no longer be needed."

He returned to the *Advocate* a conquering hero. "I felt quite exhilarated really. I recommend it," he told a reporter for the paper. "It was a challenge. I don't know why that turns me on, but it does."

In July, he made a second streak. The L.A. City Council had been debating a ban on nudity in public areas, including a Venice Beach spot beloved by skinny-dippers. Four hundred people packed the council chamber. As a councilwoman spoke, Opel strode up the aisle, stripped off his jumpsuit, leaped over a rope, and stood next to the stunned police chief, Ed Davis. He made a peace sign with his fingers and asked, "Is this lewd?" He was booked for indecent exposure and disturbing a public meeting. The nudity ban passed, 12–1.

His trial, at which he dressed as Uncle Sam, kept his name in the papers. "Indecent exposure generally means there was something sexual about it," his lawyer argued. "We're quite sure in this case that Opel didn't come there to make love to the city councilmen." On the witness stand, Opel testified, "I wanted to give the council an example of what a live nude person looked like, and to show them that there were no reasons to conclude that simply being nude was being lewd." The jury found him guilty only of disturbing the meeting ("OPEL NOT LEWD," the *Advocate* declared on its front page), and he received a four-month sentence.

Opel rarely spoke of his time in jail. Undaunted, he embraced his new role as "unemployed propagandist." That September, in the wake of Richard Nixon's resignation, he announced his candidacy, with his newly formed Nude Lib Party, for President of the United States, on a platform of complete disclosure. "I've got nothing to hide," he said at his first press conference, to which he wore only his mustache, "and I want to give everyone a chance to look over my qualifications." His campaign bore the slogan "Not Just Another Crooked Dick."

When his candidacy failed, he became the editor of the magazine *Finger*, which ran raunchy photos and stories sent in by real couples. By 1975, the streaking fad had petered out, but Opel published an editor's manifesto laying out his philosophy of nudity:

> The thrust of my message is: undress. As long as cover-up is part of anyone's mental set, he or she will be diminished in his efforts to be totally self-actualized. Undress goes far beyond simply urging one to remove the clothes from one's physical person. But that can be a start; a visual statement of innocence; an external sign of one's intent to exorcize hypocrisy.

He was ready to go beyond nudity. He launched a write-in campaign for City Council, sponsored by a committee called Fags for Unseating Civic Knuckleheads, or F.U.C.K. His platform was centered on removing Ed Davis, the L.A. police chief, whom he described as "a pterodactyl preying on the minds and bodies of anyone who has had an original thought since the Stone Age." He débuted a character called Mr. Penis, a cousin of Mr. Peanut, originally devised as a sculpture for a gallery show. (Mr. Penis had a partner, Virginia Vagina, whom Opel also dressed up as from time to time.) Opel appeared as Mr. Penis at the Christopher Street West parade, which had banned sexually oriented costumes, a move that one gay magazine called "Uncle Tomism attempts to win heterosexual acceptance." The parade committee ejected Opel, and, after he confronted the chairperson, he was handcuffed and jailed for three hours.

Opel had stepped into a rift in the gay movement. Whereas some waved the banner of in-your-face sexual liberation, others wanted to act respectably and assimilate into the straight world. Opel stood on the wild-and-free side, but L.A. seemed to be squeezing him out. The *Advocate*, under new ownership, was going national, and Opel's cheeky "Around Town" photos were discontinued. He had also been contributing photography and features to *Drummer*, a magazine for the gay leather community (including a Halloween cover story on "Cycle Sluts"). After the L.A.P.D. raided *Drummer's* charity S & M "slave auction"—Davis ludicrously tried to prosecute the publisher on charges of slavery—the magazine moved its operations to San Francisco. "Leaving L.A. and going to San Francisco was like leaving East Berlin for West Berlin," Jack Fritscher, who became *Drummer's* new editor-in-chief, recalled.

In 1977, Fritscher invited Opel to his office, in a Victorian building on Divisadero Street; long-haired and svelte, Opel struck him as a "sybaritic Pan." Fritscher thought they could make beautiful, kinky work together. Opel bid farewell to Hollywood. His future, and his freedom, lay in San Francisco.

HEAD OF ORPHEUS

When it was time for the suffering to end, we powered down
and sat on the steps as if waiting for a chariot
drawn by a loss for words. If only the mind were made to reflect
the world more completely, as if we agreed to it, we would be free

of so many difficulties—the path ahead of us miraculously
wrinkleless, cleared of fallen things. What we saw or heard or felt
would be an echo of what was, a duplicate of the present
willow traced by the sun on the fishpond of our wakefulness.

Easier said than done! Turns out the friction
between what's real and my take on it might be the battery
that keeps me awake to begin with, and I hadn't stopped to consider
what happens when we sleep—all those fudgy distortions

and embellishments tricked in gold. This only goes to show
how scatterbrained hope makes me, how poorly we navigate
when we don't look back to balance what's ahead of us
against what's behind—fair analogue to what's outside us versus in.

You have less to say at this pivot point than I imagined, or maybe
you're just keeping it all to yourself for now, but know,
as I go on detangling these lines from the invisible, it's always you
I'm reaching out for, even more so now I can't see where you've gone.

—*Timothy Donnelly*

The city had earned its reputation as "Sodom by the Bay." In Eureka Valley, formerly an Irish Catholic enclave, gay men bought up Victorian houses on the main drag, Castro Street, turning the neighborhood into a gay mecca. By one police estimate, from 1976, some eighty gay men were arriving every week, and about a hundred and forty thousand of the city's residents were gay—more than a fifth of the population. In "The Mayor of Castro Street," the journalist Randy Shilts described the well-honed mating ritual: "Eye contact first, maybe a slight nod, and, if all goes well, the right strut over to the intended with an appropriately cool grunt of greeting." The bars and bathhouses thumped to Donna Summer, Gloria Gaynor, and T-Connection, whose 1977 hit "Do What You Wanna Do" doubled as an anthem of liberation.

Opel splashed into the round-the-clock bacchanal in the spring of 1977. He set his sights on South of Market, the home of the gay leather scene, raunchier than the Castro. SOMA, as it came to be called, was an old industrial neighborhood, and the burly leatherfolk blended in among the scrap-metal workers and the hash-slingers at Hamburger Mary's. One such resident was Jim Stewart, who ran an erotic-photography business called Keyhole Studios out of his apartment. In his memoir, "Folsom Street Blues," Stewart wrote of finding a man with long dark hair and a trimmed beard at his door one day. He looked familiar. "Why do I think I know you?" Stewart asked him. "Have we fucked?"

"I streaked the Academy Awards," Opel said. He explained that he was opening an art gallery nearby, on Howard Street, and he told Stewart, "I need hot artists to hang." Gay artists had been showing their work mostly at bars, and Opel was turning a storefront into a gallery that would embody his boundary-pushing aesthetic. He'd live in an apartment in the back. He called it Fey-Way Studios—a play on "fey," in the limp-wrist sense, and a nod to the "King Kong" starlet Fay Wray.

Fey-Way opened on March 10, 1978, with an invitation-only preview of a show called "X: Pornographic Art." Among the artists on display was a little-known thirty-one-year-old named Robert Mapplethorpe, who had been documenting New York's gay demimonde to scant notice. He had come to the city to see Jack Fritscher, the *Drummer* editor, with whom he was having an affair.

Fritscher had introduced the two Roberts at his house. People had already been confusing the two, fusing them into a person named Robert Oplethorpe. In Fritscher's kitchen, as he recalled in his book "Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera," the two Roberts sized each other up over a joint and some beers. Opel needed artists, and Mapplethorpe needed venues that would show his racy photos.

Opel had been toying with new ideas for magazines, one called *Cocksucker* and another *National Pornographic* ("The Magazine That Puts Filth Back Where It Belongs"). He had asked Fritscher to submit a dirty story. At the kitchen table, Fritscher handed Opel seven typed pages. "I want you to read it to me," Opel said.

Fritscher demurred, saying, "Erotica is best read privately at home."

"Come on, Jack," Mapplethorpe interjected. "You're talking to a performance artist."

"O.K." As Fritscher read aloud, Opel unzipped his jeans. Mapplethorpe giggled from the sidelines as he watched what happened next. When Fritscher got to the end, Opel, satisfied, zipped up and took out his checkbook. "Will a hundred and twenty-five dollars do?" he said.

"I thought *I* had to work hard to sell a piece of art," Mapplethorpe said.

Opel replied, "You should see my rejection slip."

As Opel was preparing to open Fey-Way Studios, Anita Bryant, the singer and citrus spokeswoman turned anti-gay crusader, was campaigning to repeal a Florida ordinance prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. In San Francisco, conservatives who had held their noses through the Summer of Love now believed that gays were defiling their city. The San Francisco Police Department had a record of harassing gays; on weekends, they'd round up barhoppers in the Castro and beat them with nightsticks. Graffiti urged passersby to "Save San Francisco—Kill a Fag."

The Castro had its own self-styled hero. In some ways, Harvey Milk was a mirror image of Opel. Both had conservative beginnings—Milk had campaigned for Barry Goldwater in 1964—and became radicalized in the late sixties; Milk fell in with the gay Greenwich Village crowd and started going to antiwar rallies. Both had come to San Francisco and opened storefront businesses: Opel at Fey-Way Studios, and Milk at Castro Camera. But, while Opel embraced his wildness, Milk bought a three-piece suit and ran for office, using his shop as his campaign headquarters. Opel wanted to undermine the establishment; Milk wanted to infiltrate it.

One day, Opel walked into Castro Camera. Behind the counter sat one of Milk's young acolytes, Danny Nicoletta. Opel wanted to submit to Milk a campaign poster he'd made: a surly-looking woman exposing her left breast, with a "Harvey Milk for Supervisor" pin piercing her nipple. "Ooh, creepy," Nicoletta recalled thinking. The campaign declined to use it.

On Election Day, the mostly white, conservative District 8 elected to the Board of Supervisors a former police officer named Dan White, who had campaigned to restore traditional values to a city besieged by "radicals, social deviates, and incorrigibles." But the headlines belonged to Milk, in District 5, who became the first openly gay elected official in the country and celebrated his win by leading an impromptu parade down Market Street, with trolleys ringing their bells in celebration.

Rebuffed by the Milk campaign, Opel focussed on Fey-Way, a party hub for the SOMA scene. Opel's friend Lee Mentley said, "There'd be everyone from drag queens and S & M leather boys and girls to matrons from Pacific Heights and upper-class people who could afford to buy the art." When people found out that Opel was the Oscar streaker, he'd brag, "No one even remembers who won the Oscar that year!"

Opel exhibited underground artists from around the world, such as the Japanese fetish artist Go Mishima and Tom of Finland, a cult figure known for his drawings of men with rippling muscles and bulging groins. To the straight world—and much of the gay world—the leather scene was the unseemly underbelly of gay liberation. Dianne Feinstein, Harvey Milk's colleague on the Board of Supervisors, fretted, "One of the uncomfortable parts of San Francisco's liberalism has been the encouragement of sadism and masochism." But the S & M fantasies that Opel showed offered an escape. "We allowed terrified people to act out counter-phobic rituals that helped them deal with the stress and tension caused by the persecution everybody was suffering," Fritscher recalled.

In California, the spectre of persecution was acute. Anita Bryant's success in Florida inspired John Briggs, a state legislator from Orange County, to sponsor a bill that would ban gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools, singling out San Francisco as a "moral garbage dump." Proposition 6, or the Briggs Initiative, sparked a counter-operation to sway public opinion, with Milk at the forefront. For Opel, who had been fired from education jobs, the Briggs Initiative hit a nerve. Prop 6 went down in a landslide vote, owing in part to bipartisan opposition from both former Governor Reagan and President Jimmy Carter. A brass band preceded Milk's victory speech in the Castro, in which he urged gays everywhere to come out of the closet and "smash the myths once and for all." The celebrations in the streets lasted until 4 A.M.

Then it all unravelled. Eleven days later came news from Jonestown, the Guyana outpost of the Peoples Temple, the cult led by Jim Jones, which had been headquartered in San Francisco. On one Saturday, more than nine hundred people died in a mass murder-suicide, after drinking cyanide-spiked Flavor Aid. Grieving families wandered San Francisco, and scandal loomed for the mayor, George Moscone, who had received critical support from the Peoples Temple. The city was still absorbing the news when, on November 27th, a gunman climbed through a basement window into City Hall and assassinated both Moscone and Milk in their offices. It fell to Feinstein, Milk's fellow-supervisor, to announce that the murderer was their colleague Dan White.

Within a week, police and firemen were rumored to have raised a hundred thousand dollars for White's defense fund. Graffiti appeared around town saying "Kill Fags: Dan White for Mayor." In the gay community, theories swirled: Had Milk been set up? How did White get into City Hall with a gun? Opel began collecting clues. Since the Oscars, his life had been one big dirty joke, but the explosion of political violence gave him a new sense of purpose. He believed that a conspiracy was at work, and he was planning to write a play about what had really happened to Harvey Milk.

Just after Thanksgiving in 1978, a woman in a biker jacket landed in San Francisco. A punk diva with a penchant for mysticism, Camille O'Grady was the creative partner Opel didn't know he was missing. At the Pratt Institute, in New York, she'd made huge drawings that she would burn in public; people thought she was a witch. One day, a classmate complimented a drawing, saying, "Wow, you're really good for a girl." It was Robert Mapplethorpe.

O'Grady and Mapplethorpe began sleeping together—they liked trading underwear—although he was seeing men on the side. He had been living and collaborating with Patti Smith, with whom O'Grady formed a rivalry. O'Grady's band, Leather Secrets, played at CBGB before Smith did, and, according to O'Grady, Smith didn't think there was room for the both of them. (Smith doesn't recall any of this and maintains that she "would not have been intimidated by her.")

So, in late 1978, O'Grady moved west, with a hundred dollars in her pocket. Mapplethorpe had told her to look up Opel. When she got to his gallery, they had a four-hour mind meld. He asked her to perform at Fey-Way on New Year's Eve, and they became lovers.

Opel's friends weren't fazed by his bisexuality. "Camille O'Grady was to Robert Opel what Patti Smith was to Robert Mapplethorpe," Fritscher said. Opel would send her on romantic scavenger hunts and sing her the Kinks' "Celluloid Heroes." "He was an eternal kid," O'Grady told me. "Sometimes when he got really loaded he did a perfect Jimmy Stewart. The thing that he did not suffer gladly was shitheads in government. He hated them." At a midnight show at Fey-Way called "Christmas Fix," O'Grady sang and Opel premièred his film "Fuck You Santa Claus." Soon afterward, O'Grady moved in.

As 1979 began, Opel was looking to get his own cable station, which could be accomplished with five hundred dollars and eighteen hours of footage. He videotaped himself interviewing such acquaintances as John Waters and Divine. To make ends meet, he was selling speed and angel dust, or PCP. O'Grady didn't like the unsavory types who hung around Fey-Way, particularly a guy named Dana Challman, who sold Opel quaaludes. She worried about Opel, who would run down the street naked in a drugged-out frenzy and have to be escorted home. She would videotape his sprees and show him the next day. "You think this stuff is so great?" she'd say. "You curl up in a ball and scream."

In May, Dan White was convicted of two counts of voluntary manslaughter and sentenced to seven years and eight months in prison—a shockingly light sentence. An expert witness had suggested that junk food could have affected his behavior; the press dubbed it the "Twinkie defense." The gay community was enraged. On Castro Street, hundreds of protesters marched, chanting "Out of the bars and into the streets!" and "Avenge Harvey Milk!" Police deployed nightsticks and tear gas, and protesters torched police cars. One man turned from a flaming car and yelled at a reporter, "Make sure you put in the paper that I ate too many Twinkies." As night fell, police invaded the Castro, smashing windows and skulls.

Soon after the White Night riots, as they were called, Opel appeared, in a red bandanna, at a benefit for protesters who had been arrested, and advocated for an end to the "cycle of violence." But he was fired up. When Feinstein officially announced that she would run to succeed Moscone as mayor, Opel crashed the event in leather and a Nazi emblem. Before he was shown out, he shouted at Feinstein about a new idea. At the upcoming Gay Freedom Day Parade, he said, he planned to stage a "pseudo-event" called "The Execution of Dan White." Later, he made a poster with a shirtless leather man brandishing a gun, out of which exploded the words "WHAT WOULD HAPPEN if a QUEER gay homosexual pervert cocksucker faggot shot and killed an ex-cop. . . . Would he get away with murder?"

It was a good question: Would justice have been served if someone like Opel had shot someone like White? The phone at Fey-Way rang with death threats, but Opel was unperturbed. He borrowed a prop gun from his friend Jim Stewart and found a policeman outfit, telling friends that he wanted to "dress a man up like Dan White and shoot him" at the parade. Opel sent a letter to Feinstein at City Hall, trying to enlist her in a faux trial. "Such a 'show trial,' which would attract worldwide media attention, could prove to be a great cathartic event," he wrote. She presumably did not respond.

The day of the parade was overcast, the festivity undergirded by angst. "It was like donning a frivolous mask to visit a dying friend's sickroom," the *Bay Area Reporter* observed. Amid the flag twirlers, Opel, on a float that he had put together, made his way down the parade route. At United Nations Plaza, the float paused in front of a crowd of reporters. Opel introduced himself as Gay Justice. Then, with his prop gun, he "executed" a Dan White look-alike. The performance made the evening news.

Opel returned to the gallery. Fey-Way was finally in the black, and he had plans to buy the whole building. Dizzy with ambition, he wrote his sister Mary, "I like the life I lead and I think it will become more interesting as I become more visible. I'm very determined and have long range plans." He went on, "A lot of the struggles are over—internal and external. The rewards are starting to happen."

Two weeks later, on July 8, 1979, O'Grady went out to a club called the Plunge, which had a plexiglass dance floor over a swimming pool. Opel was sick in bed, so O'Grady took a friend named Anthony Rogers, an ex-lover of Opel's. At the club, she had a premonition. "Anthony," she said, "we've got to go back to the house."

Around 9 P.M., they were hanging out with Opel in the back of the gallery when the front buzzer rang. Opel answered the door and found two "Tenderloin types," O'Grady said, strung out on speed. The first, who wore a fedora and a crystal stickpin in his jacket, made his way inside and pulled out a .38 handgun. O'Grady listened from the back. According to court testimony, the man said either "This is for Dana" or "This is from Dana." She recognized the name. Dana Challman, the dealer, had been there the night before, and O'Grady had berated Opel for letting him in.

"I don't want to see that," Opel said, backing away from the gun. "Put it away." The man demanded drugs or money. Opel pleaded, "There's nothing here." The second man pulled out a sawed-off shotgun. He was a biker type: bleached-denim clothes, weathered face. O'Grady and Rogers came out from the back.

"Camille, call the police," Rogers told her. But the second man planted the shotgun muzzle on her neck.

"Give us the money or I'll kill her," he said.

"You'll have to kill us all," Opel insisted. "There's no money."

The first man told the second to march O'Grady and Rogers to the back and "take them out." He led them to the kitchen and sat them on the floor.

Out in the gallery, the first man barked at Opel, "I'll blow your head off." Then he fired a warning shot at the ceiling.

"I want you out of my space," Opel snarled. "Get out." From the kitchen, O'Grady heard a second shot. "I am not giving you nothing," Opel said. "You are going to have to shoot me." Then O'Grady heard a third shot. Then a thud.

The second man ripped the phone from the wall and used the cord to tie up O'Grady and Rogers, and the intruders fled. O'Grady and Rogers freed themselves and ran out to see Opel lying in a pool of blood, taking his final breaths. He'd been shot above the left eye. At 10:40 P.M., he was pronounced dead at San Francisco General Hospital.

"GAY MILITANT SLAIN IN PORN ART GALLERY," the San Francisco *Examiner* reported the next day. Opel's friends mourned the outrageous yet thoughtful man they knew. "Opel taught us that sexual freedom is political above all else," one told the *Examiner*. *Drummer* printed a portrait by Jim Stewart of Opel holding a skull, Hamlet style, alongside a declaration that Opel had written:

> I am Robert Opel. I am an artist, a cocksucker and an anarchist. My life is my art. Sometimes I use a camera. Sometimes I have trouble disseminating images I record because people seem to be frightened of sexual imagery. Men like myself have been feared and persecuted because of our sexual preference. But I persist. Eventually, I believe, I will receive wider attention.

Coming so soon after Opel's antics at the parade, the murder struck the gay community as more than a random stickup. "Robert Opel was a dangerous man because he said things no one wanted to hear, did things no one wanted to see," the *Bay Area Reporter* wrote. He "was not the victim of just an attempted robbery." Two days after the murder, signs appeared around San Francisco announcing a memorial service. Across one of them, someone wrote, "ASSASSINATED ARTIST." Mapplethorpe joked, "I think Opel was shot by critics disguised as gunmen."

Camille O'Grady drew sketches of the two gunmen, and they were picked up at the airport and identified as Maurice Keenan and Robert Kelly.

Robert Opel, photographed in 1979 by Jack Fritscher, at Fey-Way Studios.

JACK FRITSCHER

O'Grady was wary of the police, and aspects of the investigation unnerved her. At the homicide unit, she'd noticed a box of evidence labelled "HOMOCIDE." Dana Challman, she told me, emerged from the detectives' office and knelt next to her. He told her that he had given Keenan and Kelly their guns. "I burned them in front of your house," he said, meaning that he'd sold them bad drugs, and blamed it on Opel. O'Grady wondered: Was this connected to the death threats Opel had received about the Dan White performance? Was Challman working with the cops?

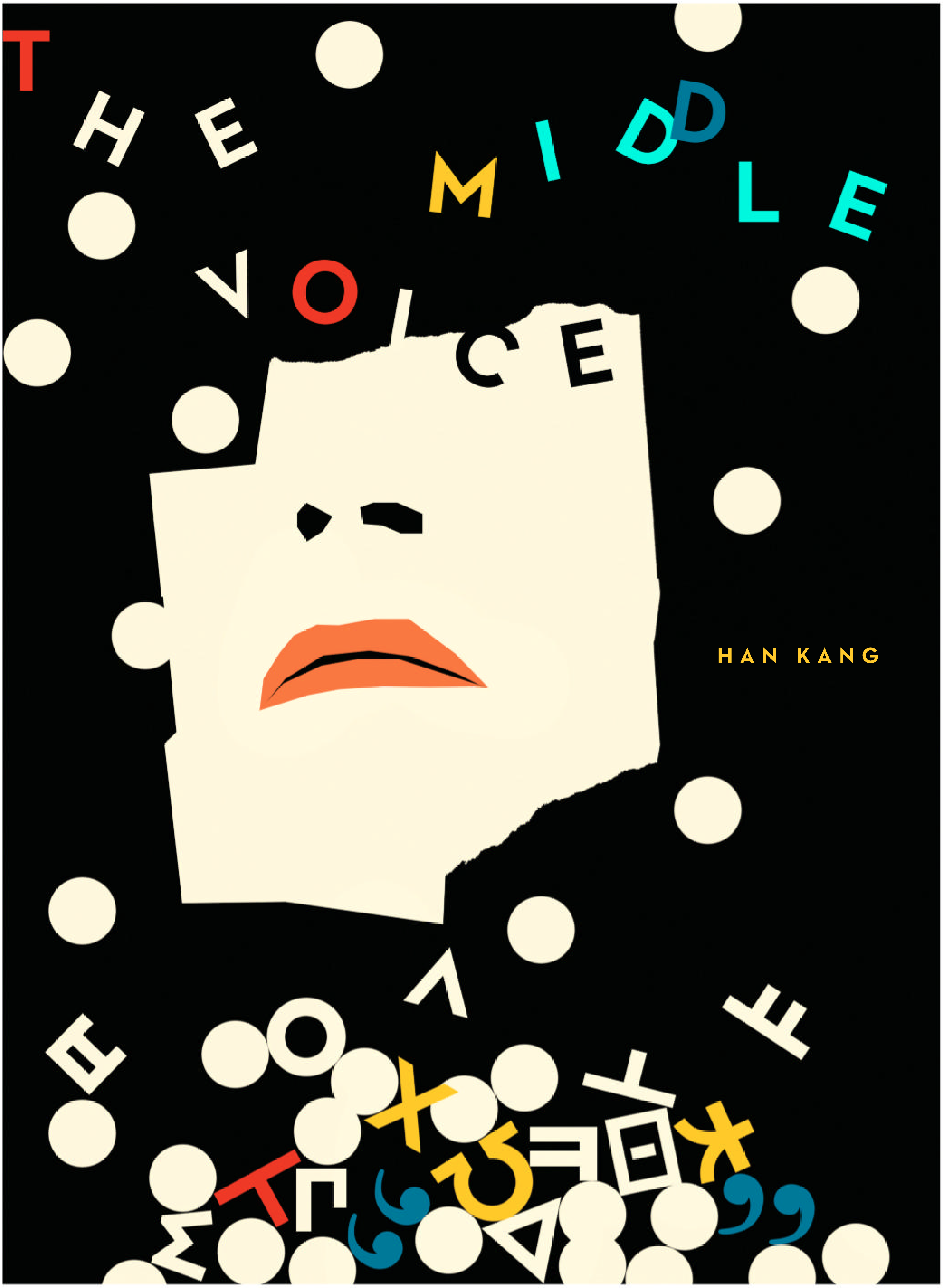
The trial of Maurice Keenan began in November, 1982. In pretrial proceedings, he was belligerent, high on smuggled LSD. His wife was into black magic, and she would sit in court and cast spells on the jurors. The day before Opel's murder, Keenan had shot one of his dealers, paranoid that he was working for "the Man." He was convinced that Fey-Way Studios was loaded with drugs and cash. A psychologist testified that Keenan had a "rather severe paranoid personality disorder." The jury found him guilty. The penalty was death.

In 1990, at a San Francisco leather-man cocktail party, a stranger told Jack Fritscher that Opel had been shot by rogue cops who were carrying on the "queer extermination work" of Dan White. Opel's name had been on a "homo hit list." It wasn't clear whether this was new inside information or the decade-old urban legend coming full circle. By then, "queer extermination" was more than a metaphor. Almost two years to the day after Opel was killed, the *Times* ran the headline "RARE CANCER SEEN IN 41 HOMOSEXUALS." The AIDS epidemic decimated the gay community in San Francisco and beyond; among its victims would be Robert Mapplethorpe and Anthony Rogers. As President Reagan and the Moral Majority came to power, the freewheeling gay culture of the seventies receded. Opel's death had foreshadowed the end of the party.

After Keenan spent twenty years on death row, his sentence was commuted to life without parole. Evidence of jury misconduct had come to light. One juror, a sheet-metal worker, had argued during deliberations, "If the victim had been a nun or my daughter, I'd be for the death penalty, but since the victim was a fag it doesn't matter."

Opel's dash across the Academy Awards stage has been memorialized as one of the Oscars' weirdest moments, an act of delightful disobedience. "Robert was dream fulfillment to Oscar viewers," Fritscher said. "Every year, his memory puts an edge of suspense on the Oscars, like a promise that something unscripted and exciting and sexy might happen."

Weeks before Opel was shot, he and O'Grady were sitting around Fey-Way with a joint, as Fritscher recorded their musings for *Drummer*. The streak came up. "It's like a Möbius," Opel said. "I'm destined to be always running nude past the TV screen forever and ever and ever." ◆



THE MIDDLE VOICE

HAN KANG

ILLUSTRATION BY LUCY JONES

The woman brings her hands together in front of her chest. Frowns, and looks up at the blackboard.

"O.K., read it out," the man with the thick-lensed, silver-rimmed spectacles says with a smile.

The woman's lips twitch. She moistens her lower lip with the tip of her tongue. In front of her chest, her hands are quietly restless. She opens her mouth, and closes it again. She holds her breath, then exhales deeply. The man steps toward the blackboard and patiently asks her again to read.

The woman's eyelids tremble. Like insects' wings rubbing briskly together. The woman closes her eyes, reopens them. As if she hopes in the moment of opening her eyes to find herself transported to some other location.

The man adjusts his glasses, his fingers thickly floured with white chalk.

"Come on, now, out loud."

The woman wears a high-necked black sweater and black trousers. The jacket she's hung on her chair is black, and the scarf she's put in her big, black cloth bag is knitted from black wool. Above that sombre uniform, which makes it seem as if she's just come from a funeral, her face is thin and drawn, like the elongated features of certain clay sculptures.

She is neither young nor particularly beautiful. Her eyes have an intelligent look, but the constant spasming of her eyelids makes this hard to perceive. Her back and shoulders are permanently hunched over, as though she is seeking refuge inside her black clothes, and her fingernails are clipped severely. Around her left wrist is a dark-purple velvet hairband, the solitary point of color on an otherwise monochrome figure.

"Let's all read it together." The man cannot wait for the woman any longer. He moves his gaze over the baby-faced university student who sits in the same row as the woman, the middle-aged man half hidden behind a pillar, and the young postgraduate student sitting by the window, slouching in his chair.

"*Emos*, *hēmeteros*. 'My,' 'our.'" The three students read, their voices low and shy. "*Sos*, *humeteros*. 'Your' singular, 'your' plural."

The man standing by the blackboard looks to be in his mid- to late thirties. He is slight, with eyebrows like bold accents over his eyes and a deep groove at the base of his nose. A faint smile of restrained emotion plays around his mouth. His dark-brown corduroy jacket has fawn-colored leather elbow patches. The sleeves are a bit short, exposing his wrists. The woman gazes up at the scar that runs in a slender pale curve from the edge of his left eyelid to the edge of his mouth. When she'd seen it in their first lesson, she'd thought of it as marking where tears had once flowed.

Behind pale-green lenses, the man's eyes are fixed on the woman's tightly shut mouth. The smile vanishes. His expression stiffens. He turns to the blackboard and dashes off a short sentence in ancient Greek. Before he has time to add the diacritical marks, the chalk snaps and both halves fall to the floor.

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Late spring of the previous year, the woman herself had been standing at a blackboard, one chalk-dusted hand pressed against it. When a minute or so had passed and she was still unable to produce the next word, her students had started to shift in their seats and mutter among themselves. Glaring fiercely, she saw neither students nor ceiling nor window, only the empty air in front of her.

"Are you O.K., *seonsaengnim*?" asked the young woman with curly hair and sweet eyes who sat at the very front of the class. The woman tried to force a smile, but all that happened was that her eyelids spasmed for a while. The students, a little more than forty in number, looked at one another with raised eyebrows. *What's she up to*? Whispered questions spread from desk to desk.

The only thing she was able to do was walk calmly out of the classroom. Exerting herself, she managed it. The moment she stepped into the corridor, the hushed whispers became clamorous, as though amplified through a loudspeaker, swallowing the sound her shoes made against the stone floor. Trembling lips pressed firmly together, she muttered to herself from somewhere deeper than her tongue and throat, *It's come back*.

It first happened the winter after she turned sixteen. The language that had pricked and confined her like clothing made from a thousand needles abruptly disappeared. Words still reached her ears, but now a dense layer of air buffered the space between her cochleas and her brain. Wrapped in that foggy silence, her memories of the tongue and lips that had been used to pronounce, of the hand that had firmly gripped the pencil, grew remote. She no longer thought in language. She moved without language and understood without language, as she had before she learned to speak—no, before she had obtained life. Silence, absorbing the flow of time like balls of cotton, enveloped her body both outside and in.

The psychiatrist to whom her alarmed mother had taken her gave her tablets that she hid under her tongue and later buried in the flower bed at home. By the time dark-red stamens began to sprout from the salvia in the flower bed, nourished by her buried medicine, a consultation between the psychiatrist and her mother had resulted in her being sent back to school. It was clear that being cooped up at home hadn't helped, and she mustn't fall behind her peers.

The state high school that she entered for the first time, months after the letter announcing the new school year beginning in March had arrived at their door, was a dreary, intimidating place. The classes were already far advanced. The teachers were imperious, regardless of age. None of her peers showed any interest in a girl who spoke not a single word from morning to evening. When she was called on to read from a textbook or when the students were told to count out loud during P.E., she would look vacantly up at the teachers and, without exception, be sent to the back of the classroom or have her cheek slapped.

Despite what her psychiatrist and her mother had hoped, the stimulus of social interaction didn't fracture her silence. Instead, a brighter and more concentrated stillness filled the dark clay jar of her body. In the crowded streets on the way home, she walked weightlessly, as though encased in a huge soap bubble. Inside this gleaming quiet, which was like gazing up at the surface from underwater, cars roared thunderously by and pedestrians' elbows jabbed her in the shoulders and arms, then vanished.

After a long time had passed, she began to wonder.

What if that perfectly ordinary French

"It's just someone I know from work."

word, in that perfectly ordinary lesson, hadn't sparked something in her? What if she hadn't inadvertently remembered language, like remembering the existence of an atrophied organ? Why French and not, say, classical Chinese or English? Perhaps because of the novelty of it, because it was a language she could opt to learn now that she was in secondary school. Her gaze had lifted blankly to the blackboard as usual, but there it had snagged on something. The short, balding French teacher was pointing to the word as he pronounced it. Caught off guard, she found her lips trembling into motion like a child's. *Bibliothèque*. The mumbled sound came from a place deeper than tongue and throat.

There was no way she could have known how important that moment was.

The terror was still only vague, the pain hesitant to reveal its circuit from the depths of silence. Where spelling, phonemes, and loose meaning met, a slow-burning fuse of elation and transgression was lit.

After graduating from university, the woman had worked first for a book publisher and then at an editorial-production company for a little more than six years; after that she spent almost seven years lecturing on literature at a couple of universities and an arts secondary school in and around the capital. She produced three collections of serious poetry, which came out at three- or four-year intervals, and for several years had contributed a column to a biweekly literary review. Recently, as one of the founding members of a culture magazine whose title had yet to be decided, she'd been attending editorial meetings every Wednesday afternoon.

Now that it had come back, she had no choice but to abandon all such things.

There had been no indication that it might happen, and there was no reason it should have happened. Of course, it was true that she'd lost her mother six months previously, divorced several years earlier, and eventually lost custody of her eight-year-old son, and it was coming on five months since he had moved in with her ex-husband, after a prolonged battle in the courts. Because he was both the eldest grandson by the firstborn son and the only male child on his father's side, because he was not so very young anymore, because her ex-husband unswervingly maintained that she was too highly strung and that this was a bad influence on the boy—the records of the psychiatric treatment she'd received in her teens were presented as evidence—because her income, compared with her husband's (he had recently been promoted to the bank's head office), was both paltry and irregular, the hearing resulted in a comprehensive defeat.

The gray-haired psychotherapist she'd seen once a week because of insomnia after the boy's departure couldn't understand why she denied such clear causes. *No*, she wrote, using the blank paper left out on the table. *It isn't as simple as that*.

That was their final session. Psychotherapy conducted through writing took too long, with too much scope for misunderstanding. She politely turned down the psychotherapist's proposal to introduce her to a speech-and-language specialist.

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The woman rests both hands on the desk. Her posture stiff, she bows as though she is a child waiting to have her fingernails examined. She listens to the man's voice filling the lecture hall.

"In addition to the passive and the active voice, there is a third voice in ancient Greek, which I explained briefly in the previous lesson, yes?"

The young man sitting in the same row as the woman nods emphatically. He's a second-year philosophy student, whose rounded cheeks give him the air of a smart, mischievous kid.

The woman turns to look toward the window. Her gaze passes over the profile of the postgraduate student, who scraped by with a pass in premed but didn't have it in him to be responsible for the lives of others, so gave it up to study the history of medicine. He's big and has a chubby, double-chinned face, and wears round, black, horn-rimmed glasses, and at first glance appears easygoing. He spends every break with the young philosophy student—they bat silly jokes back and forth in ringing voices. But the instant the lesson begins his attitude changes. Anyone can see how tense he is, terrified of making a mistake.

"This voice, which we call the middle voice, can express an action that relates to the subject reflexively."

Outside the second-floor window, sporadic points of orange illuminate the bleak low-rise buildings. The young broadleaf trees hide the bare outline of their skinny black branches in the darkness. Her gaze passes silently over the desolate scene, the frightened features of the postgrad student, the pale wrists of the Greek lecturer.

Unlike before, the silence that has now returned after a period of twenty years is neither warm nor dense nor bright. If that original silence was similar to that which exists before birth, this new silence is more like that which follows death. Whereas in the past she had been submerged underwater, staring up at the glimmering world above, she now seems to have become a shadow, riding on the cold hard surface of walls and bare ground, an outside observer of a life contained in an enormous water tank. She can hear and read every single word, but her lips won't crack open to emit sound. Like a shadow bereft of physical form, like the hollow interior of a dead tree, like that dark blank interstitial space between one meteor and another, it is a bitter, thin silence.

Twenty years ago, she failed to predict that an unfamiliar language, one with little or no resemblance to Korean, her mother tongue, might break her silence. She has chosen to learn ancient Greek at this private academy because she wants to reclaim language of her own volition. She is almost entirely uninterested in the literature of Homer, Plato, and Herodotus, or in the literature of the later period, written in demotic Greek, which her fellow-students wish to read in the original. Had a course been offered in Burmese or Sanskrit, languages that use an even more unfamiliar script, she would have chosen that instead.

"For example, using the verb 'to take,' in the middle voice, ultimately means 'I choose.' The verb 'to wash' would be rendered, in the middle voice, 'I wash X,' when X is a part of myself. There is an expression in English, 'He hanged himself,' right? Ancient Greek doesn't need to say 'himself'—if we use the middle voice, the same meaning can be expressed in a single word. Like this," the lecturer says, and writes on the blackboard: ἀπήγξατο.

Musing over the letters on the blackboard, the woman picks up her pencil and writes the word in her notebook. She hasn't come across a language with such intricate rules before. The verbs can change their form according to, variously: the subject's grammatical person and number; the tense, of which there are various grades; the mood, of which there are four distinct types; and the voice, of which there are three. But it is thanks to these unusually elaborate and meticulous rules that the individual sentences are, in fact, simple and clear. There is no need to specify the subject, or even to keep to a strict word order. This one word—modified to denote that the subject is third-person singular; the tense aorist, meaning it describes something that occurred and concluded at some point in the past; and the voice middle—has compressed within it the meaning that someone has hanged himself.

Around the period when her child—the child she had borne eight years ago and for whom she had now been deemed unfit to care—first learned to speak, she had dreamed of a single word in which all human language was encompassed. It was a nightmare so vivid as to leave her back drenched in sweat. One single word, bonded with a tremendous density and gravity. A language that would, the moment someone opened her mouth and pronounced it, explode and expand as all matter had at the universe's beginning. Every time she put her tired, fretful child to bed and drifted into a light sleep herself, she would dream that the immense crystallized mass of all language was being primed like an ice-cold explosive in the center of her hot heart, encased in her pulsing ventricles.

She bites down on that sensation, the mere memory of which is chilling, and writes: ἀπήγξατο.

A language as cold and hard as a pillar of ice. A language that does not wait to be combined with any other prior to use, a supremely self-sufficient language. A language that can part the lips only after irrevocably determining causality and manner.

She sits without speaking amid the rumble of the students reading. The Greek lecturer no longer makes an issue of her silence. He angles his body away from the class and wipes the sentences from the blackboard, rubbing the soft eraser cloth over the board with expansive sweeps of his arm.

"Starting in June, we will read Plato," the Greek lecturer announces, leaning against the now clean blackboard. "Of course, we will continue to study grammar alongside." He holds the chalk in his right hand, and uses his left to push his glasses farther up his nose.

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Even when she could talk, she'd always been soft-spoken. It wasn't an issue of vocal cords or lung capacity. She just didn't like taking up space. Everyone occupies a certain amount of physical space according to his or her body mass, but voice travels far beyond that. She had no wish to disseminate her self. Whether on the subway or in the street, in a café or at a restaurant, she never spoke in an unreservedly loud voice or called out after someone to get his attention. In every situation—the only exception was when she was lecturing—hers was the quietest voice in the room. Already very thin, she would hunch her shoulders and back so that her body took up less room. She understood humor and had quite a cheerful smile, but when she laughed it was so low as to be barely audible.

Even when she could speak, she would sometimes simply fix her eyes on her interlocutor, as though she believed it was possible to translate perfectly what she wished to say through her gaze. She greeted people, expressed thanks, and apologized, all with her eyes rather than with words. To her, there was no touch as instantaneous and intuitive as the gaze. It was close to being the only way of touching without touch.

Language, by comparison, is an infinitely more physical way to touch. It moves lungs and throat and tongue and lips, it vibrates the air as it wings its way to the listener. The tongue grows dry, saliva spatters, the lips crack. When she found that physical process too much to bear, she was unable to concentrate on writing, even when she was alone. Just as she had always disliked the way her voice diffused through the air, she found it difficult to tolerate the disturbance her sentences wreaked on the silence. At times, she could taste bile at the back of her throat even before she put pen to paper, merely by thinking about writing a word or two.

There had been times when she had peered at the shapes of the words she'd just written, before slowly opening her lips and sounding them out. She had at once been struck by the incongruity of the flattened forms that resembled pinned-down bodies and her own voice belatedly attempting to speak them. She would stop reading and swallow, her throat dry. Like those times when she had to immediately press down on a cut to stop the bleeding, or, on the contrary, strain to squeeze out blood to prevent bacteria from entering her bloodstream.

The gray-haired therapist tried to find the root cause in her childhood. She coöperated with him only halfway. Not wishing to disclose her experience of having lost language as a teen, she managed to retrieve a memory from farther back.

Her mother had come down with what appeared to be typhoid fever when she was pregnant with her. Suffering alternate bouts of fever and chills, she took a handful of tablets with every meal for about a month. Her mother had been brash and impetuous by nature, quite unlike her daughter, and as soon as she was back on her feet she went to the gynecologist and said she wanted the baby gone. She had determined that it couldn't possibly turn out healthy, given the medication she'd been taking.

The doctor told her that a termination would be dangerous, as the placenta had already formed, and told her to come back in two months' time, when he would give her an injection to induce a stillbirth. But, when those two months were almost over and the fetus began to move, her resolve weakened, and she did not go to the hospital. She was plagued by anxiety up until the moment the baby was born. Only after she had repeatedly counted the newborn baby's fingers and toes, still slick with amniotic fluid, was her mind set at ease.

Aunts, cousins, even the meddling neighbor who lived next door told this anecdote to her while she was growing up. *You came within an inch of not being born.* That sentence was repeated like an incantation.

She was too young then to be able to read her own emotions well, but the horrifying coldness contained in that sentence was something she felt clearly. She almost hadn't been born. The world was not something that had been given to her as a matter of course. It was merely a possibility that the chance combination of countless variables in the pitch blackness had permitted, a fragile bubble that had coalesced ever so briefly in the nick of time. One evening, after saying an awkward goodbye to her mother's boisterous, cheerful guests, she had squatted on the maru at the front of the house and watched as the gathering twilight buried the yard. She told the therapist how, as she sat there with muffled breath and hunched shoulders, she had felt the thin, flimsy, enormous single-layer world being swallowed up in the darkness.

The therapist thought this was all very interesting. "You were too young to understand life, and naturally were without the means to live independently then, and every time you heard about what a close call your birth had been you felt a sense of being threatened, as though your whole existence were going to be blotted out. But you've grown into a fine adult and now are strong enough to face such things. You don't have to be afraid. You don't have to cower. It's all right to speak up. Straighten your shoulders and take up as much space as you like."

But she knew that if she followed that reasoning the rest of her life would be one long struggle to find a response to the question that constantly threatened to destroy her fragile equilibrium—the question of whether she really had any claim to existence. Something in the therapist's lucid, beautiful conclusion didn't sit right. She still did not wish to take up more space, nor did she believe that she had lived in thrall to fear, or spent her life suppressing what came naturally to her.

Their sessions progressed smoothly, and so when, after five months, her voice hadn't grown stronger and instead she became mute, the therapist seemed genuinely shocked. "I understand," he said. "I understand how much you've suffered. It must have been agonizing for you to accept losing the custody battle, not to mention the death of your mother immediately before. How unbearably you must have missed your child in the last few months. I understand. You must have felt that it was impossible to withstand everything on your own."

The exaggerated note of earnest sympathy in his voice astounded her. What she found most intolerable was his claim that he understood her. This was simply not true, and she knew it with a serene certainty.

Silence, the quiet assuager, enveloped them, waiting.

She picked up the pen and paper in front of her and wrote in a neat hand, *No. It isn't that simple.*

•

παθεῖν
μαθεῖν

"These two verbs mean 'to suffer' and 'to learn.' Do you see how they're almost identical? What Socrates is doing here is punning on these words to remark on the similarity of the two actions."

She extracts the hexagonal pencil that she has been absent-mindedly leaning on with her elbow. After rubbing her smarting skin, she copies the two words written on the blackboard into her notebook. She writes them first using the Greek alphabet, then tries but ultimately fails to write the meaning next to them in her own language. Instead, she raises her left fist and rubs her sleepless eyes. She looks up at the pallid face of the Greek lecturer. At the chalk clutched in his hand, the letters of her mother tongue like withered bloodstains, but white, distinct on the blackboard.

She bows her head over the book that lies open on her desk. It's a thick dual-language edition of the first few books of Plato's "Republic," containing both the original Greek and the Korean translation. Drops of sweat trickle down from her temples and fall onto the Greek sentences. The coarse-grained recycled paper bulges where they land.

"However, we cannot see the twinning of these verbs simply as a play on words. Since, for Socrates, learning literally meant suffering. Even granting that Socrates himself did not think this in so many words, the thought was at least formulated as such by the young Plato."

On Thursdays, when Greek class meets, she packs her bag a little earlier than she needs to. After alighting from the bus several stops before the academy, she walks, enduring the afternoon heat radiating from the tarmac. Even after she slips into the building's shadowed interior, her whole body is drenched in sweat for a while.

Once, she had just gone up to the first floor when she saw the Greek lecturer walking ahead of her. She stopped in her tracks instinctively. She held her breath so as not to make a sound. Having already sensed someone's presence, he turned to look back over his shoulder and smiled. It was a smile that mingled closeness, awkwardness, and resignation, and made it clear that he had been about to greet her, then brought himself up short. After that day, when she happened to bump into him on the stairs or in the corridor, he did not smile but greeted her faintly with his eyes.

When she raises her head, it seems as though the dimly lit classroom has suddenly brightened, unsettling her. She looks up at the blackboard, blank now during the break. The lecturer has wiped it clean with the cloth eraser, but only lightly, so there are still the odd fragments of Greek script visible. She can even make out a third of a sentence. And a rough whirl of smudged chalk that looks intentional, as if it were done with a broad brush.

She bends over the book again. She takes a deep breath, and hears the distinct sound of her inhalation. Since losing speech, she gets the sense sometimes that her inhalations and exhalations resemble speech. They seem to stir the silence as boldly as the voice does. She'd had a similar thought while witnessing her mother's final moments. Every time her mother, by then in a coma, expelled a mouthful of hot breath, silence took a step back. And, when she breathed in, the shudderingly cold silence shrieked as it was sucked into her mother's body.

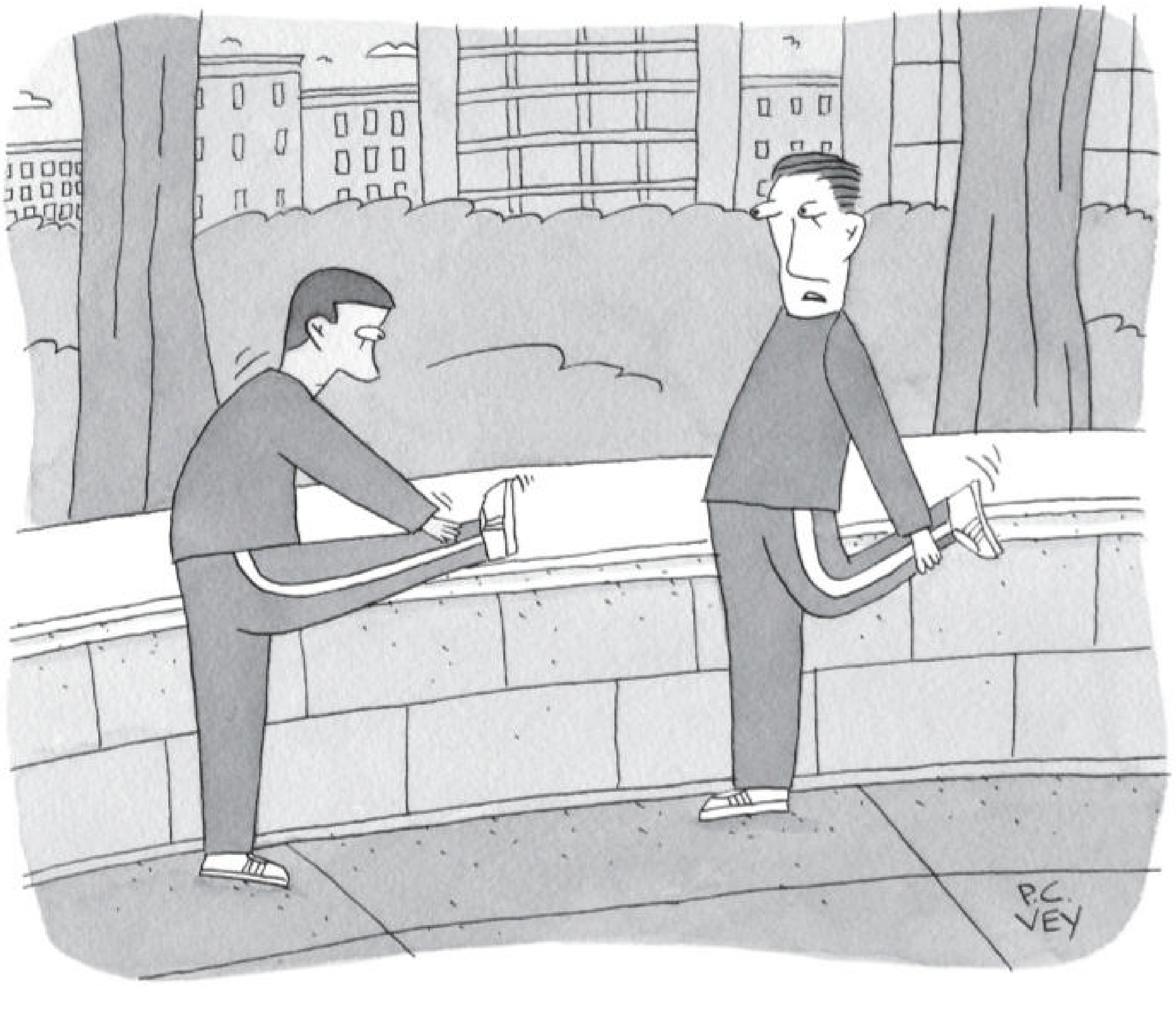
She clutches the pencil and peers at the sentence she was just reading. She could puncture every single one of these letters. If she pressed down with the pencil lead and made a long tear, she could bore through a whole word, no, a whole sentence. She examines the small black letters, conspicuous on the coarse gray paper, the diacritics that resemble insects both curled up and stretching their backs. A place in shadow, obscured and difficult to tread. A sentence in which Plato, no longer young, ponders and stalls for time. The indistinct voice of someone whose mouth is hidden behind his hand.

She tightens her grip on the pencil. Carefully, she breathes out. The emotion permeating the sentence becomes apparent, like chalk marks or a casual thread of dried blood. She endures it.

Her body bears witness to the fact of her long-term muteness. It appears firmer or heavier than it really is. Her footsteps, the movements of her hands and arms, the long, rounded contours of her face and shoulders—all demarcate clear, strong perimeters. Nothing seeps out, and nothing seeps in past these limits.

She had never been one to spend a great deal of time examining herself in the mirror, but now the very thought seems incomprehensible to her. The face we each imagine most frequently in the course of our lives must be our own. But, once she stopped picturing her face, she found that over time it began to feel unreal. When she happens to catch a glimpse of her face reflected in a window or a mirror, she examines her eyes carefully. Those two clear pupils seem to her to be the only passage linking her to that stranger's face.

Sometimes she thinks of herself as more like some form of substance, a moving solid or liquid, than like a person. When she eats hot rice, she feels that she herself becomes that rice, and when she washes her face with cold water there is no distinction between her and that water. At the same time, she knows that she is neither rice nor water but some harsh, solid substance that will never commingle with any being, living or otherwise. The only things that she sees as worth reclaiming from the icy silence, something that takes all the strength she possesses, are the face of the child with whom she has



"This seems like an awful lot of trouble to go through just to eventually give up."

been allowed to spend one night every two weeks and the dead Greek words that she gouges into the paper with the pencil she grips.

γῆ κεῖται γυνή.

A woman lies on the ground.

She puts down the pencil, which is sticky with sweat. With the palm of her hand, she wipes away the beads of moisture that cling to her temples.

•

"Mom, they've said I can't come here anymore after September."

Last Saturday night, she had stared at her son's face in alarm at these words. He'd grown again, even in the space of two weeks, looking taller, but also slimmer, than before. His lashes were long and thin, tiny diagonals clearly outlined over his soft white cheeks, like a miniature drawing done in pen.

"I don't want to go. My English isn't even that good. Dad's sister who lives there, I've never even met her. He says I have to go for a whole year. I've only just managed to make friends, and now I have to move again?"

She'd just bathed and put the child to bed, and an apple scent rose from his hair. She could see her face reflected in his round eyes. His face was reflected again in the reflection of her eyes, and in those eyes there was her face again . . . in an infinite series of reflections.

"Mom, can't you talk to Dad? If you can't talk, can't you write him a letter? Can't I come back to live here again?"

He turned his face to the wall in frustration, and she silently reached out her hand and turned him back to face her.

"I can't? I can't come back? Why not?"

He turned to face the wall again. "Turn off the light, please. How can I sleep when it's so bright?"

She stood up and switched off the light.

The glow from the street lights shone in through the ground-floor window, so she was soon able to make out the clear form of her child in the darkness. There was a deep furrow at the center of his forehead. She laid her hand there and smoothed it out. He frowned again. He lay there with his eyes tightly shut, and even his breathing was muted.

In the late-night darkness of June, the smell of waterlogged grass and tree sap mingled with the smell of food waste.

SIMPLE

My heart is completely simple, of one
substance like a mole, a dark heap

of pigment mired in a bland
it doesn't mind. My mouth

is a promise in a driver's-side mirror
and adjusts with a button that gives

with a pinkie flick. My feet demurely
callused because I will work and work.

I may as well have had just one organ,
so simple am I, one tube, like a sea sponge

with brine washing my osculum,
crumbing up my fibrous pores. There is nothing

scary, amiss, or unrelatable about me,
who am comme il faut. You'd think

I was a plant, you'd think, No problem!,
getting closer. Nothing to see at all, folks,

though no impediment to lingering
should you choose. What the bleached coral

don't say: how they drank today's hot chalice
all themselves. No one put me up to sipping

risk and sitting pretty. What the reefs
don't tell twirls deep in their two-dozen

thousand fevered genes, similar in number
to the human, though sickened by the sunblocks,

the way you like your skin to take the light
without absorbing one thing. The things

After dropping off her son, she walked the nearly two-hour route through the center of Seoul instead of taking the bus. Some of the roads were as brightly lit as they would be in the middle of the day, with suffocating exhaust fumes and blaring music, while others were dark, and decaying, and stray cats tore at rubbish bags with their teeth, and glared at her.

Her legs didn't hurt. She wasn't tired. Illuminated by the pale light in front of the elevator, she stood and stared at her front door, the door through which she was now supposed to enter, leading to the bed where she was now supposed to sleep. She turned around and went back out of the building, out into that summer-night smell, the smell of things that had once been alive going bad. She walked faster and faster, until finally she was almost running, throwing herself into the public phone booth in front of the caretaker's lodge, where she pulled all the coins she could find out of her trouser pocket.

She heard a voice. "Hello?"

She opened her mouth. She forced

you hear down here. Even the lowing whales
replicating every sunken liner’s final strut,

I let them go on, I am after bigger psychic fish,
I stand before Sancta Simplicitas and let her twitch

my veil and burn my books. I love an idol
who permits a dish of meat at each foot,

the dark flesh and the light, the spectrum
of the hunt. I love a good Doppler effect, am game

to the sluicing vowels and half-heard yodels
moving beyond my sessile place. But you who take

redshift to excess, always eluding, evading,
evaporating, why so wary? You, rounding

a corner like a double-glassed bodega when I
would have settled for heartfelt credit.

I have tried labor and I have tried play. I looked
into a tiny compact and saw the big face

and the tiny sponge. I, prey for dregs
of attention, four drags on a light that’s good,

I know, for a dozen. When I take up your day
and suck it down like a bag tight with helium,

daffy and lung-light, I am not sustained.
I am dying from taking. My gullet

capers like a piccolo. If I could have the whole
of you, the denser thing, pie weight

and plumb line, the vital pith, I think it would
enough me for beyond. You’d hardly notice.

I’d give you back, I promise, to yourself.

—*Laura Kolbe*

out a breath. She breathed in, and then out again.

The same voice spoke again. “Hello?” Her hand trembled as it clutched the receiver.

How could you dream of taking him? That far away? And for so long? You bastard. You heartless bastard.

Her teeth chattered and trembled until her spasming fingers put down the phone. She ran her hand roughly over her cheek, almost as if she were slapping her own face. She rubbed away at her philtrum, her jaw, her mouth that no one had gagged.

That night, for the first time since she lost speech, she looked at herself properly in the mirror. She thought that she must be seeing incorrectly, though she didn’t put the thought into words. Surely her eyes couldn’t be this serene. She would have been less shocked to see blood or pus or gray sludge running from them.

The hatred that had boiled up in her a long time ago went on seething, and the agony that used to surge in her remained swollen, a blister that wouldn’t burst. Nothing healed.

Nothing ended.

•

“This world is ephemeral and beautiful, is it not?” the lecturer says. “But, rather than this ephemeral and beautiful world, Plato wanted one that was eternal and beautiful.” With his placid gaze behind the pale-green lenses, he looks directly at her clear eyes. Perhaps because the students are especially unfocussed today, for close on ten minutes he has been explaining the content of the text rather than its grammar. At some point, the nature of these reading classes has come to loosely straddle Greek language and philosophy.

“People who, though they believe in beautiful objects, do not believe in beauty itself, Plato deemed such people to be in a state of dreaming, and was convinced that one could be persuaded that this was the case through reasoning. In his world, everything was upside down like this. That is to say, he considered that he himself was awake and not dreaming. He who, rather than trusting in the beautiful objects of reality, trusted only in an absolute beauty that cannot exist in reality.”

She is sitting at her desk, motionless as ever. Her back, neck, and shoulders are stiff from spending so long in the same position. She opens the notebook and scans the sentences she wrote down during the hour before the break. She jots down words in the blank spaces between the sentences. She perseveres through noun declensions and complicated usages of tense and voice to form simple, incomplete sentences, and waits for her lips and tongue to stir into motion. Waits for the first sound to spring from them.

γῆ κεῖται γυνή.

A woman lies on the ground.

χιὼν ἐπὶ δειρῇ.

Snow in throat.

ῥύπος ἐπὶ βλεφάροις.

Earth in eyes.

“What’s that?” the philosophy student, who sits in the same row as her, asks. He points to the notebook, where she’s written incomplete sentences in ancient Greek following on from γῆ κεῖται γυνή, “A woman lies on the ground," which was one of the examples they'd learned earlier in the lesson. She doesn't get flustered, doesn't hastily shut the notebook. She musters all her strength and looks at the young man's eyes as though into the depths of ice.

"Is it poetry? Poetry written in Greek?" The postgrad student sitting by the window turns to look at her, curiosity etched on his face. Just then, the lecturer comes back into the classroom.

"*Seonsaengnim!*" The philosophy student chuckles mischievously. "Look, she's been writing poetry in Greek."

In his seat behind the pillar, the middle-aged man turns to look at her, his expression one of amazed admiration, and bursts into loud laughter. Startled by the sound, she closes the notebook. She watches blankly as the lecturer approaches her chair.

"Really? Would you mind if I take a quick look?"

She has to strain to concentrate on his words, as if she were deciphering a foreign language. She looks up at his glasses, their lenses so thick they make her eyes swim. All at once she understands the situation, and packs the thick study book, her notebook, dictionary, and pencil case in her bag.

"No, please stay seated. You don't have to show it to me."

She stands up, shoulders her bag, pushes her way past the row of empty chairs, and heads for the door.

In front of the emergency exit that leads to the stairs, someone grabs hold of her arm from behind. Startled, she whips around. It's the first time she's seen the lecturer from this close. He's shorter than she thought, now that he isn't standing on the raised platform at the front of the classroom, and, oddly, his face suddenly looks aged.

"I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable." Taking a deep breath, he steps closer. "Are you . . . Do you maybe not hear what I'm saying?" He raises his hands and makes a gesture. He repeats the same gesture a couple of times, and, as if interpreting himself, haltingly speaks the words: "I'm sorry. I came out to say I'm sorry."

She stares mutely at his face, looks at him as he takes another breath and, undeterred and emphatic, continues signing: "We don't have to talk. You don't have to make any kind of answer. I'm really sorry. I came out to say I'm sorry."

•

Her son was six.

For once it was a leisurely Sunday morning, and, after an aimless conversation, she suggested to him that they come up with names for themselves based on what natural thing they most resembled. Her son liked the idea, claimed Sparkling Forest for himself, then named her, too. Decisively, as though it fitted her exactly.

"Thickly Falling Snow's Sorrow."

"What?"

"That's your name, Mom."

Not knowing what to say, she peered into his clear eyes. She lay down beside him and closed her eyes. If she opened her eyes, it seemed she would see the thickly falling snow, so she closed them even more tightly. With her eyes closed, none of it was visible. Neither the big glittering hexagonal crystals nor the flakes soft as feathers. Neither the deep purple sea nor the glacier like a white mountain peak.

There are neither words nor color for her until the night is over. Everything is covered by the thick snow. A snow that is like time, time that fractures as it freezes, settles ceaselessly over her stiff body. The child by her side isn't there. Lying motionless at the bed's chilly edge, she calls the dream into being, over and over again, to kiss her son's warm eyelids.

•

The single-lane one-way street runs for a fair stretch alongside the motorway noise barrier. She is walking along its pavement. Not many people go this way, so the council has let it get somewhat neglected. Clumps of grass rise tenaciously from the cracks in the paving slabs. The thick black branches of the acacias, which had been planted in a broad line around the flats in place of a wall, stretch toward one another like arms. The repulsive fog of exhaust fumes mingles with the scent of grass in the humid night air. This close to the road, the roar of car engines slices into her eardrums the way sharp skates cut into ice. In the grass at her feet, a grasshopper cries slowly.

It's strange.

It's as if she had already experienced a night exactly like this.

It feels like she's walked this road before, wrapped up in a similar sense of shame and embarrassment.

She would have still had language then, so the emotions would have been clearer, stronger.

But now there are no words inside her.

Words and sentences track her like ghosts, at a remove from her body, but near enough to be within ear- and eyeshot.

It is thanks to that distance that any emotion not strong enough drops away from her like a scrap of weakly adhering tape.

She only looks. She looks, and doesn't translate any of the things that she sees into language.

Images of objects form in her eyes, and they move, fluctuate, or are erased in time with her steps, without ever being translated into words.

On one such summer night, a long time ago, she had suddenly started to laugh to herself while walking down a street.

She had looked at the gibbous thirteenth-day moon, and laughed.

Thinking that it resembled someone's sullen face, that its round sunken craters were like eyes concealing disappointment, she had laughed.

As though the words inside her body had first burst out into laughter, and it was that laughter that had spread across her face.

That night when the heat that arrived just past the summer solstice had, as now, withdrawn hesitantly behind the darkness.

That night long ago that was not so long ago, her child walking ahead of her, while she followed along, cradling a huge cold watermelon in her arms.

Her voice had been affectionate as it gently diffused outward, trying to take up the minimum of space.

Her lips had shown no signs of gritted teeth.

Blood had not gathered in her eyes. ♦

(Translated, from the Korean, by Deborah Smith and Emily Yae Won.)

NEWYORKER.COM
Han Kang on how language misses its mark.

BETTMANN / GETTY

A CRITIC AT LARGE

MAKING THE NEWS

The press, the state, and the state of the press.

BY LOUIS MENAND

When the Washington *Post* unveiled the slogan "Democracy Dies in Darkness," on February 17, 2017, people in the news business made fun of it. "Sounds like the next Batman movie," the New York *Times'* executive editor, Dean Baquet, said. But it was already clear, less than a month into the Trump Administration, that destroying the credibility of the mainstream press was a White House priority, and that this would include an unabashed, and almost gleeful, policy of lying and denying. The *Post* kept track of the lies. The paper calculated that by the end of his term the President had lied 30,573 times.

Almost as soon as Donald Trump took office, he started calling the news media "the enemy of the American people." For a time, the White House barred certain news organizations, including the *Times*, CNN, Politico, and the Los Angeles *Times*, from briefings, and suspended the credentials of a CNN correspondent, Jim Acosta, who was regarded as combative by the President. "Fake news" became a standard White House response—frequently the only White House response—to stories that did not make the President look good. There were many such stories.

Suspicion is, for obvious reasons, built into the relationship between the press and government officials, but, normally, both parties have felt an interest

Popular distrust of the news media has been traced to the coverage of the stormy 1968 Democratic National Convention.

in maintaining at least the appearance of cordiality. Reporters need access so that they can write their stories, and politicians would like those stories to be friendly. Reporters also want to come across as fair and impartial, and officials want to seem coöperative and transparent. Each party is willing to accept a degree of hypocrisy on the part of the other.

With Trump, all that changed. Trump is rude. Cordiality is not a feature of his brand. And there is no coöperation in the Trump world, because everything is an agon. Trump waged war on the press, and he won, or nearly won. He persuaded millions of Americans not to believe anything they saw or heard in the non-Trumpified media, including, ultimately, the results of the 2020 Presidential election.

The press wasn't silenced in the Trump years. The press was discredited, at least among Trump supporters, and that worked just as well. It was censorship by other means. Back in 1976, even after Vietnam and Watergate, seventy-two per cent of the public said they trusted the news media. Today, the figure is thirty-four per cent. Among Republicans, it's fourteen per cent. If "Democracy Dies in Darkness" seemed a little alarmist in 2017, the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021, made it seem prescient. Democracy really was at stake.

That we need a free press for our democracy to work is a belief as old as our democracy. Hence the First Amendment. Without the free circulation of information and opinion, voters will be operating in ignorance when they choose whom to vote for and what policies to support. But what if the information is bad? What if you can't trust the reporter? What if there's no such thing as "the facts"?

As Michael Schudson pointed out in "Discovering the News" (1978), the notion that good journalism is "objective"—that is, nonpartisan and unopinionated—emerged only around the start of the twentieth century. Schudson thought that it arose as a response to growing skepticism about the whole idea of stable and reliable truths. The standard of objectivity, as he put it, "was not the final expression of a belief in facts but the assertion of a method designed for a world in which even facts could not be trusted. . . . Journalists came to believe in objectivity, to the extent that they did, because they wanted to, needed to, were forced by ordinary human aspiration to seek escape from their own deep convictions of doubt and drift." In other words, objectivity was a problematic concept from the start.

The classic statement of the problem is Walter Lippmann's book "Public Opinion," published a hundred and one years ago. Lippmann's critique remains relevant today—the Columbia Journalism School mounted a four-day conference on "Public Opinion" last fall, and people found that there was still plenty to talk about. Lippmann's argument was that journalism is not a profession. You don't need a license or an academic credential to practice the trade. All sorts of people call themselves journalists. Are all of them providing the public with reliable and disinterested news goods?

Yet journalists are quick to defend anyone who uncovers and disseminates information, as long as it's genuine, by whatever means and with whatever motives. Julian Assange is possibly a criminal. He certainly intervened in the 2016 election, allegedly with Russian help, to damage the candidacy of Hillary Clinton. But top newspaper editors have insisted that what Assange does is protected by the First Amendment, and the Committee to Protect Journalists has protested the charges against him.

Lippmann had another point: journalism is not a public service; it's a business. The most influential journalists today are employees of large corporations, and their work product is expected to be profitable. The notion that television news is, or ever was, a loss leader is a myth. In the nineteen-sixties, the nightly "Huntley-Brinkley Report" was NBC's biggest money-maker. "60 Minutes," which débuted on CBS in 1968, ranked among the top ten most watched shows on television for twenty-three years in a row.

And the business is all about the eyeballs. When ratings drop, and with them advertising revenues, correspondents change, anchors change, coverage changes. News, especially but not only cable news, is curated for an audience. So, obviously, is the information published on social media, where the algorithm selects for the audience's political preferences. It is hard to be "objective" and sell news at the same time.

What is the track record of the press since Lippmann's day? In "City of Newsmen: Public Lies and Professional Secrets in Cold War Washington" (Chicago), Kathryn J. McGarr weighs the performance of the Washington press corps during the first decades of the Cold War. She shows, by examining archived correspondence, that reporters in Washington knew perfectly well that Administrations were misleading them about national-security matters—about whether the United States was flying spy planes over the Soviet Union, for example, or training exiles to invade Cuba and depose Fidel Castro. To the extent that there was an agenda concealed by official claims of "containing Communist expansion"—to the extent that Middle East policy was designed to preserve Western access to oil fields, or that Central American policy was designed to make the region safe for United Fruit—reporters were not fooled.

So why didn't they report what they knew? McGarr, a historian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, thinks it's because the people who covered Washington for the wire services and the major dailies had an ideology. They were liberal internationalists. Until the United States intervened militarily in Vietnam—the Marines waded ashore there in 1965—that was the ideology of American élites. Like the government, and like the leaders of philanthropies such as the Ford Foundation and cultural institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, newspaper

people believed in what they saw as the central mission of Cold War policy: the defense of the North Atlantic community of nations. They supported policies that protected and promoted the liberal values in the name of which the United States had gone to war against Hitler.

Many members of the Washington press, including editors and publishers, had served in the government during the Second World War—in the Office of Strategic Services (the forerunner of the C.I.A.), in the Office of War Information, and in other capacities in Washington and London. They had been part of the war effort, and their sense of duty persisted after the war ended. Defending democracy was not just the government's job. It was the press's job, too.

When reporters were in possession of information that the American government wanted to keep secret, they therefore asked themselves whether publishing it would damage the Cold War mission. "Fighting for peace remained central to the diplomatic press corps' conception of its responsibilities," McGarr says. "Quality reporting meant being an advocate not for the government but for 'the Peace.'"

There was another reason for caution: fear of nuclear war. After the Soviets developed an atomic weapon, in 1949, and until the Test Ban Treaty of 1963, end-of-the-world nuclear anxiety was widespread, and newsmen shared it. The Cold War was a balance-of-power war. That's what the unofficial doctrine of the American government, "containment," meant: keep things as they are. Whatever tipped the scale in the wrong direction might unleash the bomb, and so newspapers were careful about what they published.

McGarr also makes it clear that the Washington press was a case of what Timothy Crouse, in his classic book on the 1972 Presidential campaign, "The Boys on the Bus," called "pack journalism." Even though newspapers were nominally in competition with one another, reporters and editors were subject to what McGarr calls "horizontal pressure"—pressure to remain on good terms with their sources and their fellow-newsmen. There was nothing like a firewall between government officials and the press. On the contrary, reporters and officials socialized frequently.

This echo chamber was peopled almost exclusively by white men. Between 1945 and 1975, there was one woman in the Cabinet and one Black person. Each served for two years. On the press side, it was worse. Female and Black reporters were programmatically excluded. They had no entrée to certain press functions, and editors did not assign women to cover government affairs. Flat-out racism and sexism persisted much longer than seems believable today.

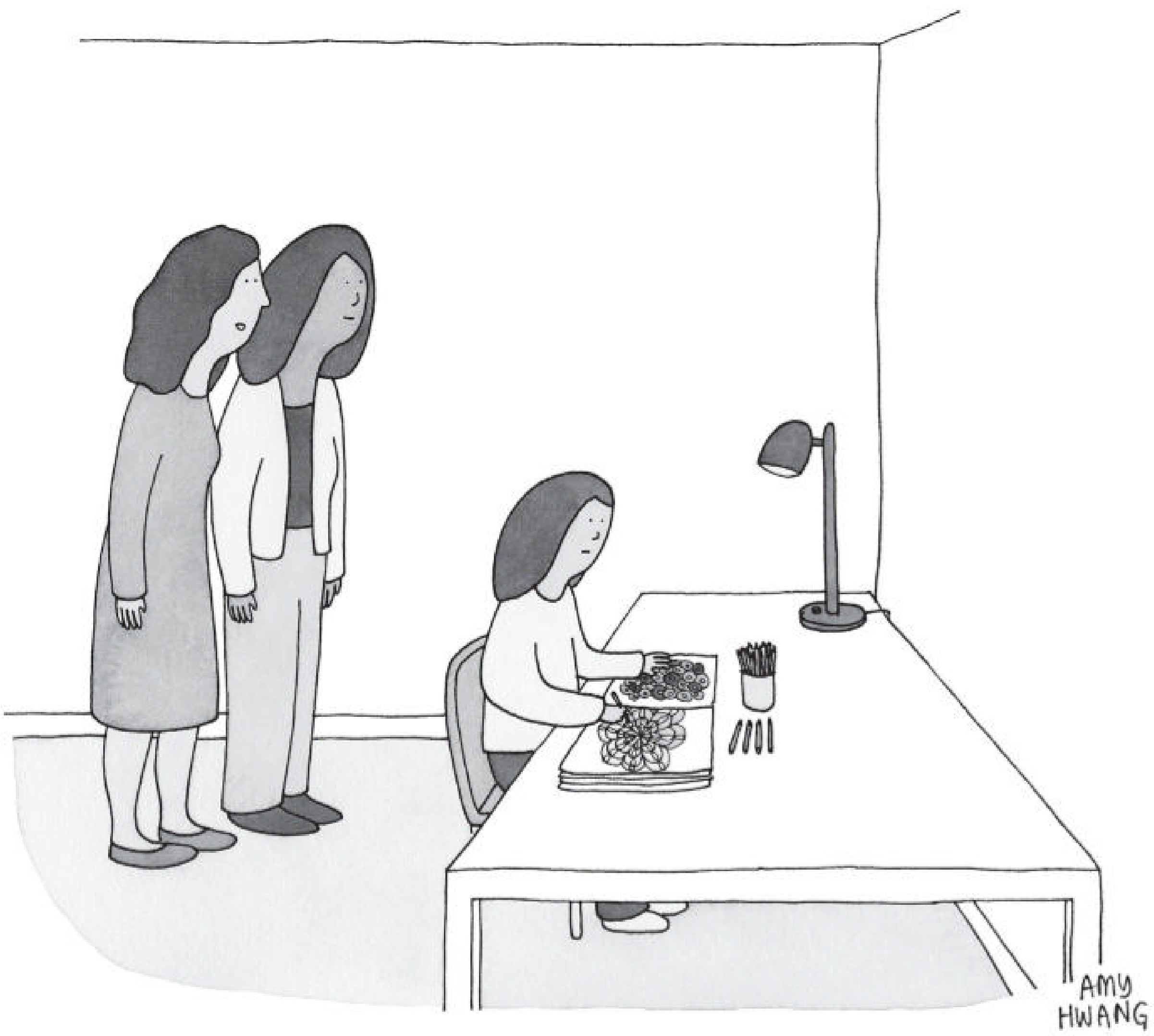
The two main social organizations for Washington journalists were the Gridiron Club (founded in 1885) and the National Press Club (founded in 1908). The Gridiron invited members' wives to a dinner in 1896, but a skit lampooning the suffrage movement did not go over well, and women were not allowed back until 1972. Into the nineteen-fifties, members performed in blackface for entertainment at Gridiron dinners. McGarr reports that the club's signature tune was "The Watermelon Song," sung in dialect.

The National Press Club did not have a Black member until 1955, which was the first year that women were allowed to attend luncheons where members were briefed by officials. The women had to sit in the balcony and were not allowed to ask questions. The National Press Club did not have a woman member until 1971.

The Washington *Post* hired its first Black reporter in 1951. He was assigned his own bathroom, and left the paper after two years. (McGarr says that the *Post* did not hire another Black reporter until 1972, but that's incorrect: the paper hired Dorothy Gilliam in 1961, and Jack White in 1968.) The *Times* did not have a Black reporter until 1966, far into the civil-rights movement. The record of general-interest magazines, including this one, was hardly better.

"City of Newsmen" is a corrective to the tendency—which arose in the nineteen-sixties and has been stubbornly persistent—to reduce everything in the pre-Vietnam period to an obsession with Communism and a blind faith in American exceptionalism. It wasn't that simple. McGarr is doing what historians should do. She is clarifying the backstory. Still, a big piece is missing from it.

Revelations about the C.I.A.'s covert involvement in what were ostensibly non-governmental organizations began in 1966, soon after the Marines landed in Vietnam—events that triggered a radical mood shift in American political life and a major change in government-press relations. It turned out that the agency had its tentacles everywhere, supporting, through cutouts and dummy foundations, organizations whose anti-Communist agendas it



"She's already on adult coloring books."

wished to promote, and planting agents wherever it could.

One of the places was the news media. In 1977, Carl Bernstein published an article in *Rolling Stone* in which he claimed that more than four hundred journalists had worked clandestinely for the C.I.A. since 1952. Major news organizations—Bernstein said that the "most valuable" were the *Times*, CBS, and *Time*—gave credentials to C.I.A. agents to use as cover in foreign countries, sold outtakes from their reports to the agency, and allowed reporters to be debriefed by C.I.A. officials.

Soon after Bernstein's piece appeared, the *Times* ran its own investigative story, in which it reported that the C.I.A. had owned or subsidized "more than 50 newspapers, news services, radio stations, periodicals and other communications entities," mostly abroad, and that "more than 30 and perhaps as many as 100 American journalists . . . worked as salaried intelligence operatives while performing their reportorial duties."

In 1980, Harrison Salisbury, a veteran *Times* man, published a book on the paper, "Without Fear or Favor," in which he reported that one of the *Times*' European correspondents, C. L. Sulzberger (a nephew of the publisher), had met roughly once a month with C.I.A. agents to trade information. (Bernstein had also named Sulzberger as an agency asset.)

Sulzberger was pissed. He did not think that he was an agent or an asset, or that he had anything to explain or apologize for. As he saw it, he was just a reporter talking to a government source. "I got a good deal more out of the C.I.A. than it got out of me," he wrote in an unpublished response to Salisbury's book. The columnist Joseph Alsop was even more unapologetic. "I'm proud they asked me and proud to have done it," he told Bernstein about his undercover work for the agency. "The notion that a newspaperman doesn't have a duty to his country is perfect balls."

The *Times* seemed to feel that the issue was whether journalists who were involved with the C.I.A. wrote propaganda—whether they deliberately spun their stories to the agency's liking. This misses the ethical point. What those reporters gave to the C.I.A. was information they did not or could not publish. This meant that they were communicating things they had been told on background or off the record by people who had no idea they were, in essence, talking to the American government. Even if the reporters kept their sources' identities secret—and it is impossible to know now just what was said to whom—they were selling them out.

By the summer of 1968, when the Democratic National Convention was held in Chicago, the Cold War modus vivendi had largely been shredded. Reporters felt that they were being used to publish the White House's lies about the progress of the war in Vietnam, and they struck back. Even before the Convention began, the *Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, CBS, and NBC had run stories saying that the war was unwinnable, in contradiction to what the Johnson Administration was telling the public. So when the Convention was being planned—Lyndon Johnson did not attend, having withdrawn from the race in March, but he was very much in charge—pains were taken to incommode the news media as much as possible.

The story of the 1968 Convention—where Johnson's Vice-President, Hubert Humphrey, won the nomination despite not having entered a single primary, and where the Party's antiwar forces were defeated at almost every turn while police and the National Guard manhandled demonstrators and cameramen in the streets, and two correspondents, Dan Rather and Mike Wallace, were roughed up by security on the Convention floor—has been told many times. "When the News Broke: Chicago 1968 and the Polarizing of America" (Chicago), by the M.I.T. media historian Heather Hendershot, takes us through that story once again, virtually hour by hour, from the point of view of the networks: CBS, anchored by Walter Cronkite (whose sign-off was "And that's the way it is"); NBC, featuring the buddy act of Chet Huntley and David Brinkley (whose sign-off was "Good night, Chet," "Good night, David"); and ABC, which, as the runt of the broadcast litter, could not afford complete coverage, and so offered viewers commentary by Gore Vidal and William F. Buckley instead, which provided a semi-farcical subplot to the main event. As Hendershot puts it, ABC "did not demonstrate a commitment to elevating the level of television discourse." (She doesn't mention that Buckley called Vidal a "queer" on the air.)

The mayor of Chicago, Richard J. Daley, was at heart a Kennedy man, but he was happy to help the President out. When the press arrived in town, they were confronted by a staggering array of inconveniences, some of them mere happenstance. There was a taxi strike. There was also an electricians' strike, which meant that not enough telephones had been installed. During the Convention, pay phones became choked with dimes as reporters tried to file.

The networks were each allowed only one mobile camera on the Convention floor and just seven press passes, which had to suffice for both television and radio coverage. Television cameras were not allowed on the streets, which meant that when the police violence occurred coverage had to be delayed while sixteen-millimetre movie film was processed.

The Battle of Michigan Avenue, as it came to be known, took place around 8 P.M. on August 28th, the third night of the Convention. The demonstrators were planning to march from Grant Park to the Convention hall, five miles away, when they were attacked in front of the Hilton Hotel, where Eugene McCarthy, the leading antiwar candidate, and Humphrey had their headquarters. Police charged into the crowd, clubbing marchers indiscriminately and arresting more than a thousand. The battle lasted just seventeen minutes. By the time film could be processed and shown on the air, about an hour later, the mayhem was over.

The news anchors maintained a posture of disinterestedness. They did not cover up the police violence, but they did not take the side of the demonstrators, either. The rioting was a story; they reported it. If anything, they underreported it. In a great book on the postwar era, "America in Our Time," the English journalist Godfrey Hodgson calculated that CBS had thirty-eight hours of coverage of the Convention, only thirty-two minutes of which were devoted to the protesters, and that NBC had nineteen hours of coverage, with only fourteen minutes devoted to the protesters.

Hendershot's numbers are slightly different, but not much, and she agrees that images of the demonstrators hardly dominated network coverage. Yet somehow Daley and the Democratic Party managed to convince viewers that the press was to blame for what they saw. People had not been shown what really happened; they should not believe what appeared on television or what the anchormen told them. Fake news.

Antiwar delegates blamed Daley. The cops were his. But, the day after the Battle of Michigan Avenue, Cronkite interviewed Daley on the air, and was almost fawning. Cronkite opened the interview with "I can tell you this, Mr. Daley, that you have a lot of supporters around the country as well as in Chicago," and proceeded to let Daley accuse reporters who had been beaten of being plants of the antiwar movement. Cronkite's biographer, Douglas Brinkley (no relation to David), calls the interview "beyond lame."

Daley was happy to take responsibility for a few cracked heads. He knew that the public would be on his side. The vast majority of Americans had no love for high-profile protesters like Abbie Hoffman and Allen Ginsberg. They were happy to see them and their followers get knocked around. People did not fault the mayor or the police for what had happened. They faulted the press.

Letters poured in accusing the networks of biased coverage. Hendershot quotes a typical one, from an Air Force colonel: "Bravo! Bravo! Bravo! Your treatment of the Yippies, hippies, junkies, hoodlums, bums, and other scum during the recent convention was perfect. I noted with delight that the police devoted some richly deserved attention to the prime provocateurs—the press." Mail to CBS ran eleven to one against the coverage. Mail to Daley, he claimed, was overwhelmingly positive.

The historian David Farber, in his book about the Convention, "Chicago '68," reports that only ten per cent of whites polled said they thought that Mayor Daley used too much force. Even among opponents of the war, more than seventy per cent reacted negatively to the protesters.

Still, it's notable that Daley was able to pin all the blame on the press. Walter Cronkite and Chet Huntley were no radicals. They were much more outspoken about the way the media was treated at the Convention than about what happened to the demonstrators. "The networks generally operated with tremendous fairness in Chicago," Hendershot writes, "and attacks after the fact were unwarranted." Yet she believes that Chicago was "a tipping point for widespread distrust of the mainstream media."

That loss of trust was taken advantage of by Republican politicians. They could see that demonizing the press was good politics. Richard Nixon, elected nine weeks after Chicago, went to war against the media. His Administration not only attacked the mainstream press rhetorically, in incendiary speeches by the Vice-President, Spiro Agnew. It also went after the networks by having the Federal Communications Commission look into antitrust violations.

This was the networks' greatest nightmare. Broadcast television had been an oligopoly from the start. An antitrust case was easy to make, and the F.C.C. proceeded to limit the amount of control the networks had over prime-time programming—which allowed Hollywood to get into the television-production business. The network era was coming to an end.

The medium got the message. After Chicago, as Hodgson explains, coverage of political unrest, the civil-rights movement, and the war was vastly reduced. By the end of 1970, people had almost forgotten about Vietnam (although Americans continued to die there for five more years), partly because they were seeing and reading much less about it. The networks understood that most viewers did not want to see images of wounded soldiers or antiwar protesters or inner-city rioters. They also understood that the government held, as it always had, the regulatory hammer.

Hendershot's argument seems to be missing a step, though. If the coverage in Chicago was (to borrow, with tongs, the slogan of Fox News) "fair and balanced," why did the public feel differently? It would make sense for the press to lose credibility if it had delivered biased or sensationalized news. But it hadn't. It had barely covered the protesters at all. Something else was going on.

That something was the war. Vietnam was the beginning of our present condition of polarization, and one of the features of polarization is that there is no such thing as objectivity or impartiality anymore. In a polarized polity, either you're with us or you're against us. You can't be disinterested, because everyone knows that disinterestedness is a façade. Viewers in 1968 didn't want fair and balanced. They wanted the press to condemn kids with long hair giving cops the finger.

We are still there today. It is said that objectivity is what we need more of, but that's not what people want. What people want is advocacy. The balance between belief and skepticism that Schudson described has tipped. It is understood now that everyone has an agenda, even Dr. Fauci. *Especially* Dr. Fauci, since he keeps talking about "science."

We say that we want the Supreme Court to be apolitical and to follow the law. But what we really want is for the Court to come out our way. In the end, we don't care what the facts are, because there are always more facts. You can't unspin the facts; you can only put a different spin on them. What we want is to see our enemy—Steve Bannon, Hunter Biden, whomever—in an orange jumpsuit. We want winners and losers. That is why much of our politics now takes place in a courtroom.

In the memoir slash manifesto "Newsroom Confidential: Lessons (and Worries) from an Ink-Stained Life" (St. Martin's), Margaret Sullivan argues that objectivity is not so much impossible today as meaningless, and that the press ought to stop striving to achieve it. The events of 2020 and 2021 showed that the press's values were in the wrong place. "The extreme right wing had its staunch all-in media allies," she writes. "The rest of the country had a mainstream press that too often couldn't, or wouldn't, do their jobs. Too many journalists couldn't seem to grasp their crucial role in American democracy."

Sullivan has had a distinguished career. She was the first woman editor of the Buffalo *News*, her hometown paper, then became the first woman public editor at the *Times*. (The public editor, a position now discontinued, responded to issues with the paper's coverage.) From 2016, the year of Trump's election, until she retired, in 2022, she was a media columnist for the Washington *Post*. Journalism is her beat.

She complains about a number of common journalistic practices (the use of anonymous sources, for example), but what concerns her most is precisely the "objectivity" standard. She thinks this leads to both-sides-ism, the insistence on giving each party in a dispute equal coverage, as CBS did with Mayor Daley in Chicago.

In her view, the traditional news media engaged in a pattern of treating election denialists as "legitimate news sources whose views, for the sake of objectivity and fairness, must be respectfully listened to and reflected in news stories." And this was true of the mainstream coverage of national politics generally. "Almost pathologically," Sullivan says, reporters "normalized the abnormal and sensationalized the mundane."

An example is the Clinton e-mail story. When, just eleven days before the 2016 election, the F.B.I. director James Comey announced that some of the e-mails Clinton wrote when she was Secretary of State had been found on the laptop of Anthony Wiener, the disgraced former New York City mayoral candidate, the *Times* went into overdrive. In six days, the paper ran as many cover stories about Clinton's e-mails as it had about all the policy issues combined in the sixty-nine days leading up to the election. This coverage set the tone for the rest of the mainstream media, which proceeded to pile on.

That Clinton was somehow a criminal for doing what her predecessor Colin Powell had also done—conduct government business using a private server—was a staple of the Trump campaign, which welcomed, of course, the release of Democratic National Committee e-mails by Assange. The e-mail story was defined by a hacker and a liar, and the press played along.

Why did the *Times* over-cover the e-mail stories? In the name, Sullivan thinks, of balance. The paper did

"O.K., fine. I'll use one of yours."

not want to appear pro-Clinton: “The *Times’* promise seemed to be: Yes, never fear, Hillary Clinton *will* be the next president, but our readers will have an exaggerated sense of her flaws when she takes the oath of office.” Let it never be said we gave her preferential treatment. (Comey was presumably operating from similar motives.)

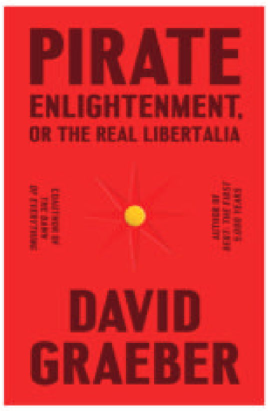
Sullivan’s conclusion that the press should take sides put her in conflict with the Washington *Post’s* editor during the Trump years, Martin Baron. She quotes from an e-mail he sent her: “When we’ve done our work with requisite rigor and thoroughness (also known as solid, objective reporting) we should tell people what we’ve learned and what remains unknown—directly, straightforwardly, unflinchingly—just as people in lots of other professions do when they’re doing their jobs correctly. That’s what ‘objectivity’ was intended to mean when the term was developed for journalism more than a century ago”—that is, when Lippmann wrote “Public Opinion.”

Sullivan’s position is an appeal to the original rationale of the First Amendment. We have a free press in order to protect democracy. When democracy is threatened, reporters and editors and publishers should have an agenda. They should be pro-democracy. Reporters should “stop asking who the winners and losers are,” Sullivan says; they should “start asking who is serving democracy and who is undermining it.” The press is in the game. It has a stake.

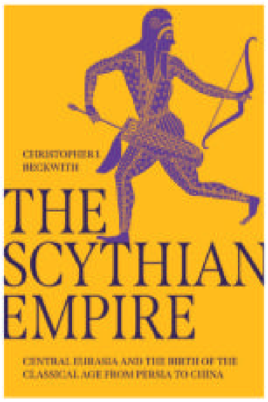
But the Cold War-era press thought it had a critical agenda, too. That agenda led many of its members to conceal actions of the government that the world now knows about, and that Americans now regret. And it led a few of them to act as spies and informants rather than as journalists.

The power of the press, such as it is, is like the power of academic scholars, scientific researchers, and Supreme Court Justices. It is not backed by force. It rests on faith: the belief that these are groups of people dedicated to pursuing the truth without fear or favor. Once they disclaim that function, they will be perceived in the way everyone else is now perceived, as spinning for gain or status. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED



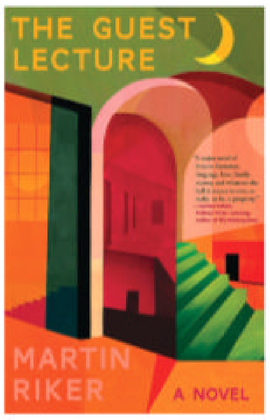
Pirate Enlightenment, Or the Real Libertalia, *by David Graeber (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)*. In this posthumous volume, the late anthropologist and anarchist continues his reëxamination of the Enlightenment by expanding the story of communities that contributed to its thought. His focus is the pirate settlements founded on the east coast of Madagascar at the turn of the eighteenth century. Having conducted field research there and consulted historical sources, Graeber hypothesizes about a loosely organized pirate kingdom created from the intermarriage of pirates and the Malagasy people. Graeber believes that pirates’ social organization was often more egalitarian than popular portrayals suggest: in a refuge far from European courts, radical political experiments were already under way.


CHRISTOPHER I. BECKWITH
THE SCYTHIAN EMPIRE
CENTRAL EURASIA AND THE BIRTH OF THE CLASSICAL AGE FROM PERSIA TO CHINA

The Scythian Empire, *by Christopher I. Beckwith (Princeton)*. Often regarded by historians as a collection of savage tribes, the Scythians emerge as a pivotal force of the ancient world in this monumental history. Although the Scythian Empire, spanning the Eurasian Steppe, was indeed geographically diffuse, Beckwith highlights previously unnoticed connections among its far-flung groups, paying particular attention to linguistic data, which show that a surprising number of familiar words and concepts have roots in Scythian. He likewise traces the ways in which elements of Scythian culture shaped later polities, including the Persian Empire, and claims that the Scythians “effectively produced the great shared cultural flowering known as the Classical Age.”

THE SENSE OF WONDER
A Novel
MATTHEW SALESSES

The Sense of Wonder, *by Matthew Salesses (Little, Brown)*. This playfully self-referential novel examines Asian American identity through the twin lenses of basketball and Korean TV dramas. Won Lee, a point guard for the Knicks, is the only Asian player in the N.B.A. His girlfriend, Carrie Kang, is a TV executive who dreams of producing “a Korean American Korean drama.” When Won leads his team to seven straight victories and becomes a media sensation, Carrie develops a series about a Korean basketball star and a sportswriter. Salesses’s novel, mimicking the melodrama of K-dramas, abounds in reversals—betrayals, infidelities, a cancer diagnosis. Such tropes, and the complex lives they reveal, are used to undermine the “model minority myth” these characters hope to transcend.



The Guest Lecture, *by Martin Riker (Black Cat)*. Abigail, the narrator of this formally innovative novel, lies awake in a hotel, running through the next day’s lecture, on the economist John Maynard Keynes. Her method of remembering is the loci technique: she envisions herself walking through her house, its rooms corresponding to her talking points. In her mental tour, Abigail is accompanied by a mental version of Keynes who tries to keep her on track, even as she careers off onto tangents, about problems domestic and professional, including a recent denial of tenure and doubts about the originality of her intellectual project. The novel succeeds in interweaving an essayistic impulse with the vulnerabilities attendant on any dark night of the soul.

MUSICAL EVENTS

FAREWELL SYMPHONY

Michael Tilson Thomas remains exuberant in the final phase of his career.

BY ALEX ROSS

The molten monument that is Mahler's Ninth Symphony is routinely described as the work of a man facing imminent death. It took shape in the summer of 1909, two years after Mahler was given a diagnosis of rheumatic heart disease. Leonard Bernstein liked to argue that the strange, staggered pulse of the opening bars replicates symptoms of Mahler's condition. The immense emotional range of the symphonic narrative that ensues—desperate longing, false triumph, vertiginous collapse, desolate meandering, damaged nostalgia, rancid rage, full-throated lament—finds resolution in twenty-seven legendarily transcendent bars for strings alone. The markings tell the story: *adagissimo* (as slow as possible), *mit inniger Empfindung* (with deep feeling), *aüsserst langsam* (extremely slow), *ersterbend* (dying away). Mahler died in 1911, with his Tenth Symphony unfinished.

The trouble with doom-laden readings of the Ninth—for Bernstein, it presaged not only its composer's death but also "the death of tonality . . . the death of music itself . . . the death of society, of our Faustian culture"—is that Mahler's entire œuvre dwells on mortality. If he had died at any earlier stage, his music could have been said to foretell his demise just as clearly. Furthermore, as the Mahler biographer Henry-Louis de La Grange argued, the composer's mood after the diagnosis was far from hopeless. In a 1908 letter to his younger colleague Bruno Walter, Mahler wrote that, although he sensed something amiss in his heartbeat, he was not consumed by a "hypochondriacal fear of death." Instead, he felt as though he were undergoing a metamorphosis: "At the end of a life, I must learn once again to walk and stand like a beginner."

The greatest contribution that a conductor can make is to expand the repertory.

That sentence passed through my mind when, in mid-January, the Los Angeles Philharmonic gave a technically flawless, emotionally charged performance of the Ninth at Disney Hall. The conductor was Michael Tilson Thomas, who, after decades of eternal boyishness, is now an elder sage of the profession. In the summer of 2021, Tilson Thomas learned that he had glioblastoma, the most aggressive form of brain cancer. His prognosis is considerably more dire than the one Mahler faced in 1907. As Tilson Thomas walked to the podium, I wondered whether he would address the audience. He is known as one of our more talkative conductors, and no one there would have begrudged him some remarks—particularly since he was born in Los Angeles, seventy-eight years ago.

Yet he remained silent, acknowledging the crowd with a couple of bows and a friendly wave of the hand. His interpretation of Mahler's valediction gave little sign of being weighed down by Bernsteinian baggage. It was, to be sure, quite slow, extending well past the ninety-minute mark; but Tilson Thomas always tends to take his time in Mahler, as is evident in his recorded cycle with the San Francisco Symphony, which he led from 1995 to 2020. This was a spacious, nuanced, sumptuously colored account of the Ninth, free of excess angst or frenzy. The work came across less as an interior drama than as an exterior landscape of mountainous vastness, its catastrophes more seismic than psychic.

The final Adagio stopped time, for a full half hour. Rather than try to wring meaning from every phrase, Tilson Thomas seemed content to maintain his hypnotic slow beat and let the strings bask in the golden-hour harmony. The coda was eerily calm, with phrases, chords, and single notes suspended like thin brushstrokes on a white canvas. Tilson Thomas has long admired the

ILLUSTRATION BY ALESSANDRO CRIPSTA

modernist master Morton Feldman, who composed at the edge of silence. The final page of the Ninth came across, enthrallingly, as a prophecy of Feldman, of music's future. Without words, Tilson Thomas was teaching one more lesson through the music that he loves.

In the past three decades, I've seen Tilson Thomas in concert thirty or so times. He has led more than a few arresting performances of mainstream repertory, but his real legacy is in the exuberant diversity of his programming. I will never forget his raucous "American Festival," in San Francisco in 1996, which included a wake-the-dead rendition of Lou Harrison's Organ Concerto and an improvisation with members of the Grateful Dead. I also recall his show about his grandparents, Bessie and Boris Thomashefsky, who had been stars of Yiddish theatre; his scalding account of Copland's Piano Variations, dispatched during a lecture at Carnegie Hall; and his flamboyant excursion through John Cage's "Song Books," with a trio of soloists that he alone could have summoned—Meredith Monk, Joan La Barbara, and Jessye Norman.

Ultimately, the greatest contribution that a conductor can make is to expand the repertory. However astounding Arturo Toscanini and Wilhelm Furtwängler may have been in Beethoven and Brahms, they failed to match the impact of Serge Koussevitzky and Leopold Stokowski, who between them brought dozens of masterpieces into the world. Tilson Thomas, who introduced major works by Feldman, Monk, and Steve Reich, will be given a comparable role when histories of the current epoch are written. In his youth, he was expected to take over one of the so-called Big Five—the venerable orchestras of the East and the Midwest. Instead, his achievement at the San Francisco Symphony, together with Esa-Pekka Salonen's at the L.A. Phil, made the notion of a Big Five untenable.

Before tackling the Mahler, Tilson Thomas led the L.A. Phil in a much different program, one whose sensuous, buoyant energy brought back memories of his early years in San Francisco. Debussy served as the anchor, and no one alive conducts that composer better. The "Prelude to 'The Afternoon of a Faun'" sounded as lucid and as vital as it did when Tilson Thomas recorded it with the Boston Symphony, back in 1971. The Fantaisie for piano and orchestra, with Jean-Yves Thibaudet as soloist, glided over compositional weak spots—Debussy was still finding his way in this score—to achieve a kind of tipsy perfection.

The remainder of the first concert veered toward delirium. Any expectation that Tilson Thomas was making some sort of solemn farewell crumbled beneath the sublime battiness of Messiaen's 1945 cantata, "Trois Petites Liturgies de la Présence Divine," which followed the "Faun" and probably offended it. Messiaen's devout Catholicism did not stop him from purveying sugary harmonies suitable to a Ziegfeld revue. Tilson Thomas, in an interview with Mark Swed, of the Los Angeles *Times*, aptly described the piece as "cocktail hour in heaven." At the same time, it is an intricate construction of unearthly beauty. Standing before an eccentric ensemble of massed strings, celesta, piano, ondes martenot, and percussion, Tilson Thomas made the contradictions cohere; the Los Angeles Master Chorale supplied vocal bliss.

The Master Chorale returned for Heitor Villa-Lobos's "Chôros No. 10," an emanation of Brazilian modernism of the nineteen-twenties. It was a deft stroke to pair this score with the "Trois Petites Liturgies," because, much like the Messiaen, it produces a seamless mishmash of seemingly clashing elements—in this case, Afro-Brazilian rhythms, birdcalls from Amazonian forests, urban popular song, cubistic orchestration out of "The Rite of Spring," and Hollywoodish climaxes. Tilson Thomas revelled in Villa-Lobos's lushness while keeping a cool grip on the proceedings. I wasn't the only listener who went away grinning, and a little dazed.

As gripping and as haunting as the Mahler Ninth was, the Franco-Brazilian adventure may linger longer in my memory. It had the thrill of risk, the joy of discovery. The roaring ovation that erupted from a sold-out house was the sound of gratitude. The lanky kid who made his conducting début at Walter Reed Junior High School, in Studio City, some sixty-five years ago, is still a talent to watch. ♦

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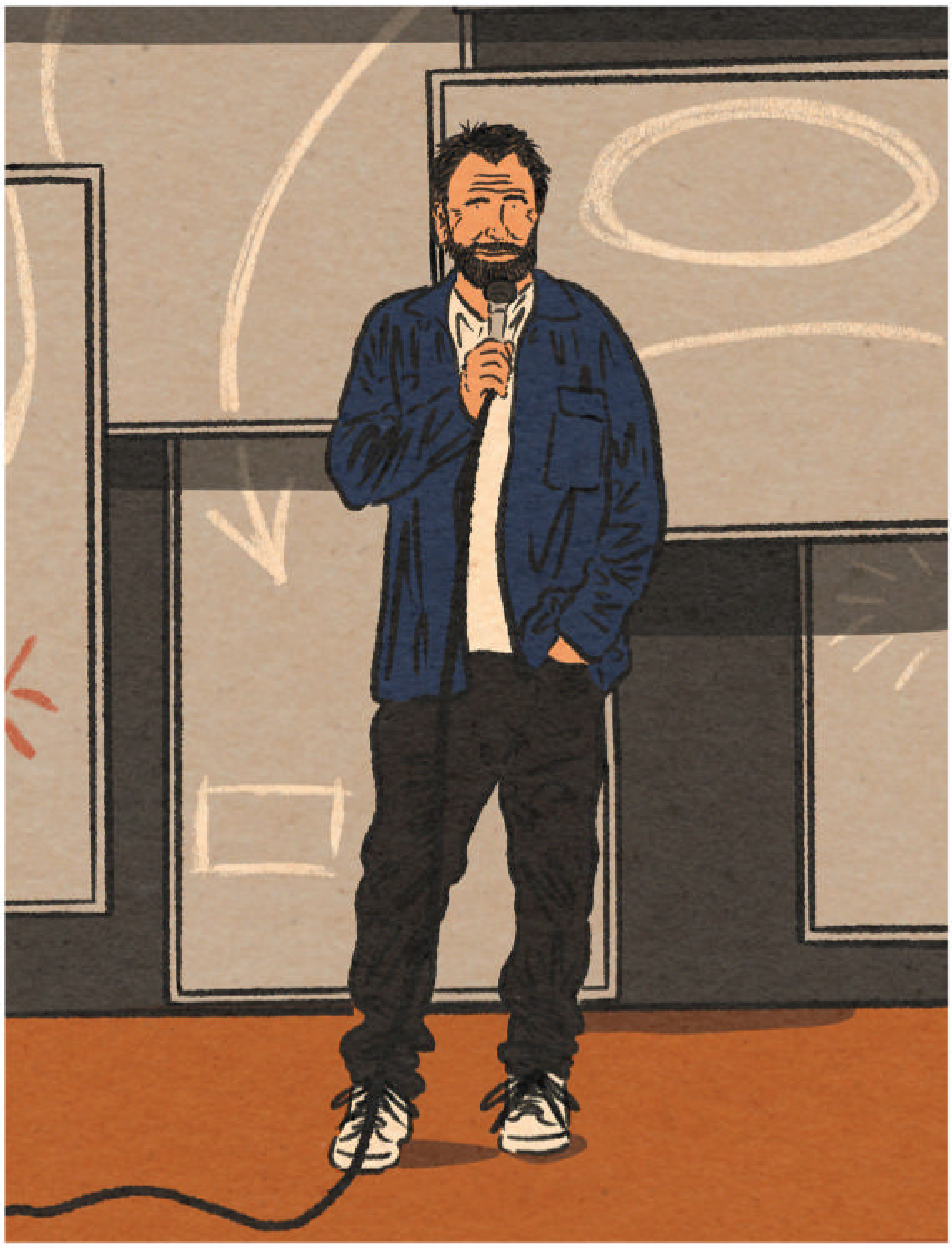
THE THEATRE

SOLITARY CREATURES

Colin Quinn, Anthony Rapp, and Evan Silver take the mike.

BY HELEN SHAW



In "Small Talk," Quinn is a Brooklyn stoop philosopher riffing on banter.

A backdrop, a stool, a beverage, a microphone. A man wanders onstage and grumbles self-deprecatingly; the audience fidgets in anticipation. The world is in flames, and such familiar comforts are an escape. Please, let us laugh.

We're living through a comedy-as-theatre boom: metatheatrical quasi-autobiographies (Kate Berlant, Daniel Kitson), avant-garde character work (Natalie Palamides, Cole Escola), quicksilver candor (Jerrod Carmichael, Taylor Tomlinson), and Spalding Gray-esque evening-length storytelling (anything written or produced by Mike Birbiglia). But Colin Quinn, in his soothing, pseudo-cantankerous standup special "Small Talk," at the Lucille Lortel, wants you to know right away that he won't be bothered with all that young person's guff. He's skeptical of social media, if you can believe it. He mocks his own untucked shirt and his gym shoes. ("I'm an old man," he says, "and I'm dressed like a twelve-year-old boy.") His performance is scripted, and loosely organized around themes, but we are mostly in shaggy-comic territory. "Small Talk" is a club set barely disguised as a show.

Quinn's beloved stage persona, tailored and then washed soft by a million tour dates, is a Brooklyn stoop philosopher, an Irish American blue-collar sage. In various comedy specials for Netflix and HBO, Quinn has gruffly shepherded his audiences through a history of the world ("Long Story Short," from 2011), American politics ("Unconstitutional," from 2015), and the formation of New York's demographic hodgepodge ("The New York Story," from 2016). In that last production, buffed to a high shine by its director, Jerry Seinfeld, Quinn talked frankly, and deliberately stereotypically, about race—a provocative high-wire act in which his tightly packed joke writing and sawtooth bonhomie served him well.

In this less polished show, directed by James Fauvell, it seems as though Quinn originally planned to talk about something bigger than small talk. The set, designed by Zoë Hurwitz, hints that he intended to chart a history of self-expression: on a series of hanging chalkboards, we see words like "Persona," reproductions of cave handprints, some emoji rebuses, and, bewilderingly, Modigliani's "Girl in a Sailor's Blouse." He never refers to these. He does, however, have a handful of tidy jokes about Socrates—"a ballbuster," he notes. ("He's, like, 'Hey, how you doing?' Guy's, like, 'Good.' And he's, like, 'But what is good?'") There are also a couple of high-density bursts of monologue, which attempt larger, more organized thinking about identity, with observations such as "Your social-media profile is who you think you are, and your browser history is who you are."

Another theme is, as the title tells us, banter. In his most beautiful passage, Quinn compares small talk to two ships signalling each other at sea:

> They're not going to talk. They're not going to stop and have a chat in the middle of the ocean. If a storm comes, they can't save each other. But they're basically acknowledging, "We understand that we're two ships and all the joy and sorrow that comes with being a ship."

Brevity is the soul of these exchanges. Quinn has a New Yorker's impatience with asking too much of your neigh-

ILLUSTRATION BY TATYANA ALANIS

bor—c'mon, bud, just acknowledge the weather and move along. He scoffs at what we once called political correctness and at the same time decries the profusion of ugly voices on the Internet. This tempts him into contradiction: he sometimes loves the invigorating wire brush of insult, other times waxes rueful about the end of manners. (He contains fuckin' multitudes.) Regardless, there's a mushy quality to "Small Talk." Some of Quinn's political observations—especially his jokes about both the left and the right being "cults"—feel overripe.

Quinn's best shows marry his bristly texture and a fitting structure, like the chronology that gave "The New York Story" a sense of momentum. In "Small Talk," you can spot waypoints—the Socrates gag, a playful bit about medieval smack talk—but his scattered musings haven't constellated. Even Quinn himself seems aware that the hour drags: one of his endearing storytelling qualities is his tendency to bum-rush his own punch lines, but this time his delivery is so quick that his words collide. Quinn's palpable menschiness still makes the performance a pleasure, but as he talks his voice fades into a soporific sound—not comedy, exactly, but comic patter.

A guy kvetching is one kind of New York lullaby; another is the "Rent" ballad "Seasons of Love," which became one of the unofficial anthems of the pandemic. If you can tell me, without doing the math, that there are five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes in a year, then you, too, have probably heard Jonathan Larson's anthem more than a few times. You'll hear it again at the beginning, middle, and end of Anthony Rapp's solo show, "Without You," at New World Stages, the actor's account of starring in the groundbreaking rock opera and of two losses that he suffered during its ascent. One of those bereavements is well known: Larson's fatal collapse, in 1996, the day after the show's dress rehearsal downtown. The other loss, which occurred after the show had moved to Broadway, was the death of Rapp's mother.

The basic components of this one-man show are the same as those of "Small Talk": a backdrop, some chairs, beverages, and a microphone (though this mike is small and taped to Rapp's temple). But in nearly every other way, the clean-cut Rapp is Quinn's opposite. Very little in "Small Talk" touches on the personal—Quinn cringes at anything that smacks of confession or mawkishness. In contrast, Rapp's manner clings; his face pleads. He pauses for the audience to applaud old news, like Larson's nearly thirty-year-old Pulitzer Prize, and, despite a light peppering of original songs and covers, he often resorts to singing numbers from Larson's masterpiece. After all, there's nothing easier than luring a "Rent" lover down memory lane.

As for Rapp's mother, it's strange that, in a piece meant as a tribute, we learn so little about her. Though Larson's lyric insists that there are more than five hundred thousand ways of measuring a life, Rapp's cabaret never attempts to list his mother's accomplishments, or to narrate her story outside of her impact on her actor son. I'm not sure that we even learn her name. We do hear a bit from her, in quotes voiced by Rapp, expressing love for him and eventual acceptance of his sexuality, taking pride in his achievements, and being terrified of cancer. Rapp has not delved further here. His best-selling autobiography, published in 2006 and also called "Without You," is both franker and, odd to say about a memoir, less self-regarding.

Of course, it is absurd for me to resent self-regard in a one-person show. What else is that mode of performance for? Put someone onstage with a mike and an audience and all those eyeballs shine back—a big compound eye, insectile and glittering. What is there to say to it other than "Look at me" or, as Quinn and so many of his fellow-comics do, "Look at yourselves"?

Oh, how I wish you'd been able to come with me to "cryptochrome." Evan Silver, a rara avis of experimental theatre, presented this piece, a gorgeous, trippy eco-cabaret, in a Bushwick warehouse space called We Are Here, as part of the Exponential Festival. In the production, Silver's alter ego Tiresias—the blind, gender-switching prophet of Greek mythology—directs us to nonhuman kinds of perception.

Again there's a backdrop, a tall perch, a beverage, a microphone. But where Quinn and Rapp presented themselves as Everydudes in jeans and sneakers, Tiresias is Maleficent in a Buddhist monastery—long black silk gloves over branchlike talons, a bald head painted as white as the moon, the rest of their body dagger-slim in narrow black pants and patent-leather boots.

Inspired by deep research into animal proprioception (the awareness of body position), Silver has composed an interlacing sequence of monologues that invite the audience to imagine the experiences of various species. Accompanied by Tristan Allen on keyboard, Tiresias tells us, in a crooning murmur, "You're a hawk," flying across an ocean guided by magnetic instinct; then you're a snake; then you're a half-digested mole in the snake's belly. Animals find their way by tasting heat, or by seeing ultraviolet light, or by echolocation. Tiresias takes a moment to sing a poignant song about Echo, the nymph who was abandoned by Narcissus and then found refuge among the whales.

This isn't exactly a one-person show. Mizuho Kappa dances elegantly on a nearby platform, playing each creature—laying eggs as a dragonfly, or fanning the air with a paper approximation of a hawk's wing. So why does Silver seem so profoundly alone? Almost as an afterthought, Tiresias tells us about human senses and their vulnerabilities—for instance, premature macular degeneration, which has left Silver, their sight fading, singing hymns about photoreceptors. The next time that moon-white face turns toward us, with a jagged line of black makeup running through it like a crack, we see it with newly tuned senses, with Silver's eyes. So *that's* what we're hoping to do at all these solo performances—to meld, for a moment, with the person at the microphone. ♦

ON TELEVISION

THRILLS AND RED PILLS

“Poker Face” and “Paul T. Goldman,” on Peacock.

BY INKOO KANG

Natasha Lyonne’s character, Charlie, often gets close to people who end up dead.

TV sleuths tend to come tortured (“True Detective”) or brilliant bordering on clairvoyant (“Sherlock”). On Natasha Lyonne’s series “Russian Doll,” her character was closer to the former: a woman laden with familial tragedy trying to suss out why she keeps dying and then being resurrected on her thirty-sixth birthday. On her new show, “Poker Face” (Peacock), a murder-of-the-week series created by the film director Rian Johnson, she plays a human lie detector: her Spidey sense goes off when someone’s not telling the truth. This premise is so silly that a different development process might have taken the project to CBS. But Lyonne’s smirkingly wise presence, combined with Johnson’s fanciful yet humanistic approach to the mystery genre (most recently seen in “Knives Out” and its sequel, “Glass Onion”), renders their “Columbo” homage a hangout procedural. Each homicide is an excuse to spend some time with Lyonne’s character, Charlie, a croakily sardonic, authority-allergic roamer who’s less a detective than a righteous snoop.

It’s noteworthy that an actor and a director with two of the most distinct sensibilities in Hollywood have come together to make the kind of syndication-friendly programming that you might have lost an afternoon to anytime in the past fifty years. (That timeless quality is reflected not just in the series’ well-worn format but in the pilot’s temporally fluid aesthetic, which mixes mid-century kitsch, seventies-era scuzz, and modern-day alienation.) “Poker Face” is meant to be as comfortingly familiar as “Russian Doll” was novel and challenging. But the show still conjures as much charisma and surprise as it can inside its rather thoughtful formula. Each episode begins with a killing, then jumps around in time to reveal Charlie’s connection to the crime—she tends to get close to people who end up dead—and her efforts to bring the perpetrator to justice.

Whenever the victims reappear onscreen, in flashbacks—a hotel maid (Dascha Polanco) who tells herself she can’t leave her controlling husband; a Texas pitmaster (Larry Brown) who grapples with an epiphany about animal suffering—a warmth suffuses the story lines. A slew of famous faces in the first six episodes (most memorably Adrien Brody, Lil Rel Howery, Ellen Barkin, Judith Light, Chloë Sevigny, and the remarkably versatile Hong Chau) enliven the occasionally fussy scripts. A sense of generosity pervades the production, especially in the decision for Lyonne not to appear until about a third of the way into many of the chapters. It feels like the star giving her fellow character actors the chance to be the Natasha Lyonne of their respective episodes.

Initially, Charlie doesn’t see much of a point to her powers. She compares lies to the sound of birds chirping: “It’s fucking everywhere all the time.” A poker player forced into retirement after too many wins—no one will seat her anymore—she now waitresses at a seedy Nevada casino. Charlie’s indoor cigarettes and desert-dry hay hair make even her work uniform, a tall feathered cap and a corseted minidress, look sarcastic. At home, she’s in aviators and trucker hats, yelling at randos on Twitter.

The first person to see potential in Charlie’s unusual talent is her new boss, Sterling (Brody), the failson of the casino’s scary founder. Sterling wants to punish a wayward client by pitting Charlie against him at the poker table, but she soon deduces some more alarming incidents at the casino that Sterling’s trying to cover up. By the end of the episode, a wounded Charlie is forced on the lam, fleeing the vengeful wrath of Sterling’s father.

ILLUSTRATION BY BIANCA BAGNARELLI

But the season is slow to serialize; it wants adventure in detours. A lonesome, justifiably paranoid trucker spouting road wisdom, played by Chau, is an early treat. Light and S. Epatha Merkerson sizzle and hiss as a pair of rebellious broads at a nursing home where Charlie briefly finds work; each new twist in their backstories exposes a darker layer to their cackling defiance. But it's the fourth installment that best showcases the series' gleaming black comedy. An aging heavy-metal front woman named Ruby Ruin (Sevigny, looking deliciously mean with bleached eyebrows) goes back on tour with her band and tries to write a follow-up to their one hit, a song that all of them have grown to resent. They bring along a much younger drummer (Nicholas Cirillo), whom they first treat like dirt, and then even less than that. Despite murder being a necessary conceit, "Poker Face" is a largely sun-soaked show. But, every so often, the series channels the rage that drives people to snuff out the threats that jostle too close.

If "Poker Face" knows when to add a dash of vinegar to balance out Lyonne's raspy sweetness, then the comic docuseries "Paul T. Goldman" offers up an experimental plate of astringent saccharin. The show's convoluted, fourth-wall-breaking premise is as follows: Paul, a self-described schlemiel in his early sixties, tells the story of his second marriage—to a fraudster named Audrey—and the delirious discoveries that he makes about her after their divorce, which he has turned into a self-published book and a screenplay. The director of the series, Jason Woliner, allows Paul to act out the more dramatic scenes from his script alongside recognizable actors like Melinda McGraw, who plays Audrey, and Dennis Haysbert, in the role of an F.B.I. agent. The first episode frames the tale as true crime. Woliner, who occasionally appears onscreen, indulges Paul's B-movie imagination and transparent self-aggrandizement, but understands that his protagonist is an unreliable narrator at best—even before the "revelations" of Audrey's links to sex work and her ostensible pimp's involvement in an international trafficking ring.

"Holy shit! I married a hooker?!" Paul says, acting out the dialogue he's written. For all its faults, the series is an astute portrait of a man who has mastered the art of concealing his misogyny behind a bumbling benignity. When Paul recalls how he met his first wife, he tells a sad-sack tale of turning forty alone and wanting to start a family—a desire that takes him to Russia to pursue a mail-order bride who is twenty-seven and "model-quality gorgeous." (He does not mention why a catalogue for mail-order brides was sent to his house in the first place.) Paul ends up marrying a different Russian woman and having a son with her. After the couple part ways, the boy's well-being becomes Paul's stated rationale for wanting to marry again. He meets Audrey on a dating site and proposes after three months.

For most of the series' six-part run, the question fuelling the narrative is "What exactly are we watching?" Is Paul a cursed narcissist coping with his loneliness by retreating into harmless fantasy, or a delusional creep whose extensive lies and disturbing patterns of harassment, even abuse, will be exposed? But Paul's undependability is soon matched by Woliner's. It's hard not to have qualms about the director setting up his protagonist to receive so much undeserved attention and sympathy, particularly as Paul's ugliness toward women comes into sharper focus. Strikingly, Paul also reminisces about a time he got fleeced so badly by a male employee that he was forced to shutter his business, but he never seeks redress from the malfeasant. Or maybe none of it ever happened.

Woliner, who's been working on some version of "Paul T. Goldman" for more than a decade, too often glosses over the grimmer implications of Paul's actions, such as the revenge porn he sends to Audrey's parents, whose woeful demise is turned into yet another sordid shock. It's particularly jarring to contrast the series with Woliner's best-known film, the "Borat" sequel, which aims some of its most serrated gags at the complicity of bystanders who witness the titular character's attempts to sell his teen-age daughter. Here, Woliner seems more concerned with giving Paul the opportunity to parse the difference between trafficking women and ordering a wife from a catalogue.

Paul, it turns out, is not only a chauvinist but a fairly run-of-the-mill one, and Woliner's anxiety about setting up such an ordinary (if unpleasant) loser for nationwide ridicule may be why he gives his subject the last word, even after disputing most of his claims. The director perhaps should have worried more that, by giving Paul a platform, he is enabling the man to spread lies about his ex-wife, who doesn't participate in the docuseries, to a larger audience. By the end, there's no reason to trust Woliner any more than his subject. ♦

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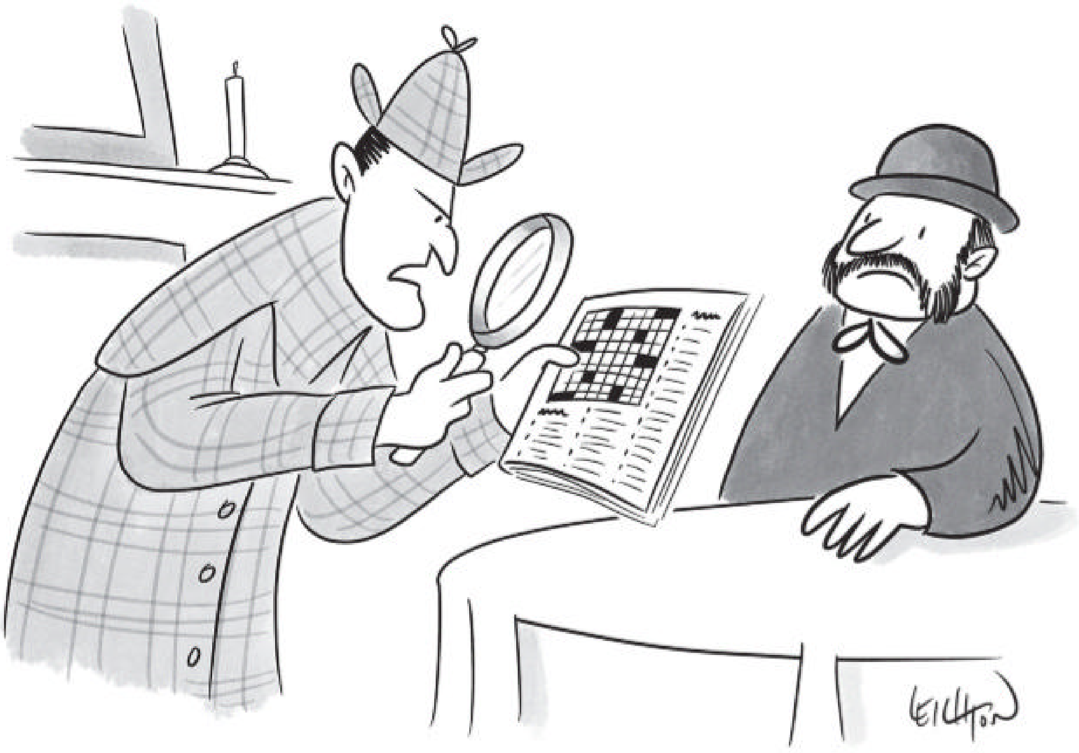
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Robert Leighton, must be received by Sunday, February 5th. The finalists in the January 23rd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 27th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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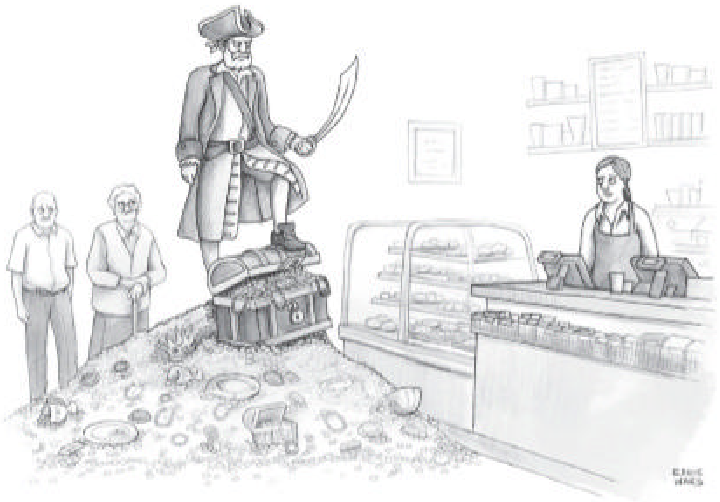
THE FINALISTS

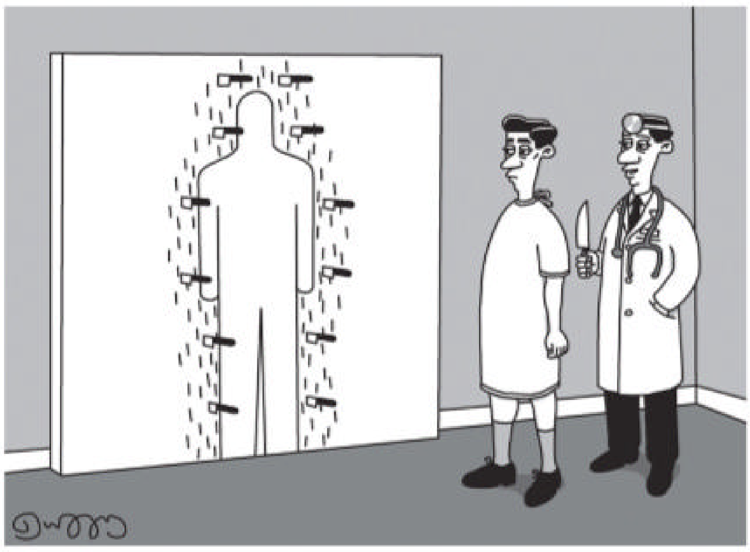


“If you're going to bury that here, you need to buy something.”
Stephen Aslett, Houston, Texas

“Order ready for Blickbeard.”
Sal Bass, Bronx, N.Y.

“We don't take plunder.”
Paul Buckner, Evanston, Ill.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“It's usually noninvasive.”
Lisa Blees, North Haven, Conn.

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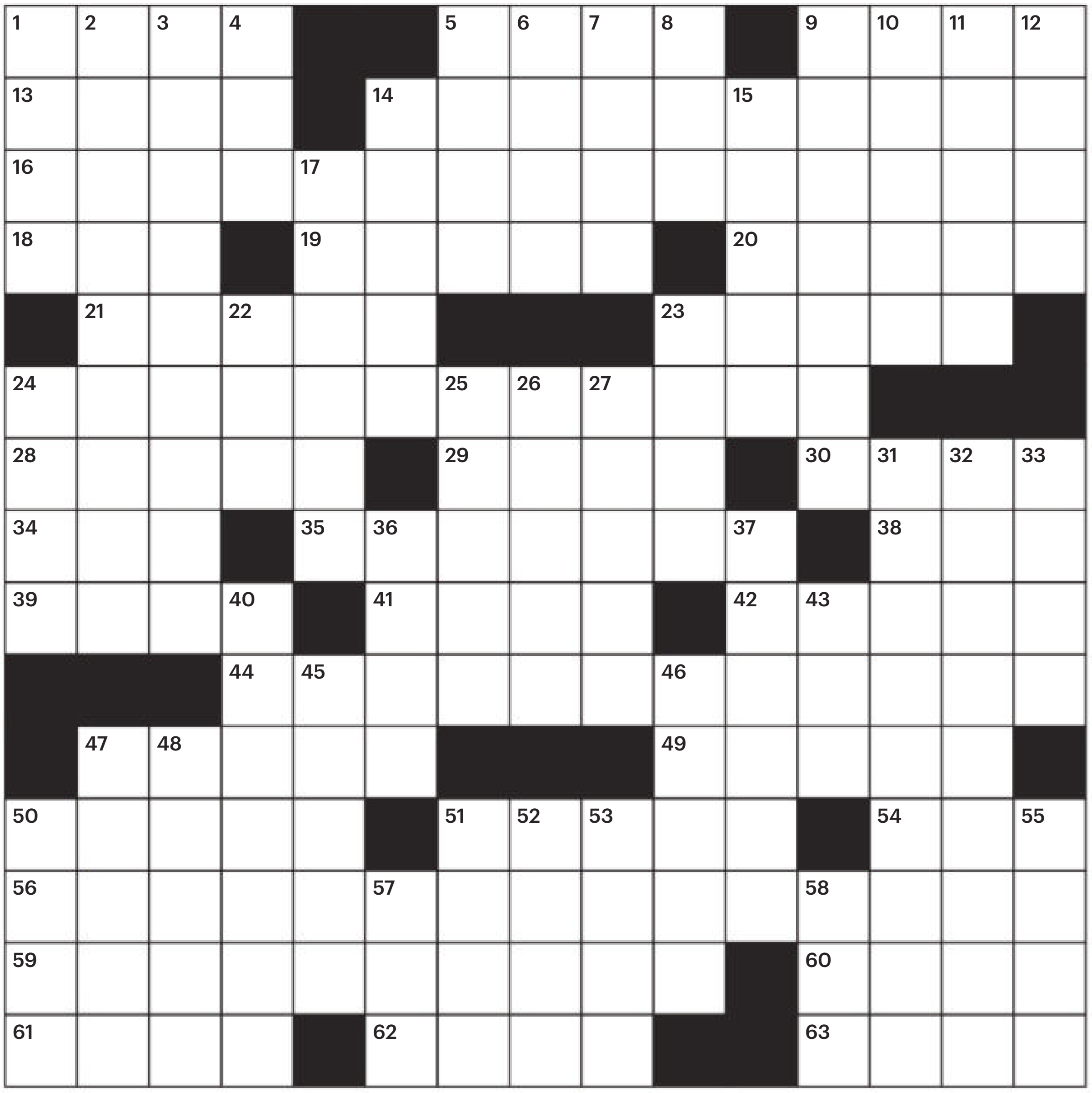
PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A beginner-friendly puzzle.

BY ELIZABETH C. GORSKI



ACROSS

1 June honorees
5 Word that can follow speed or butt
9 "I ___ Pretty" ("West Side Story" song)
13 Morales of "NYPD Blue"
14 Jefferson residence seen on a nickel
16 Havens for ravens?
18 Three, in Trieste
19 Terse but meaningful
20 Long for
21 Collectible Ford of the fifties
23 Full moon, for example
24 Attention-grabbing thespian
28 Chaos
29 "The Books of Jacob" author Tokarczuk
30 Excited about
34 Nickname for a Yale student
35 Skort's edge, say
38 Ref. work whose 2022 additions included "vax" and "folx"
39 "___ fair in love and war"
41 Face covering
42 "Yerma" playwright Federico García ___
44 Laudable
47 Rhyming partner of "moan"
49 Euphoric states
50 How bedtime stories are usually read
51 Saharan stops
54 Sault ___ Marie, Michigan
56 Film professional with an eye for talent
59 Sacred plant depicted with swirling branches in a 1909 Gustav Klimt painting
60 Flamenco guitarist ___ de Lucía
61 "You ___ Me" (Sam Cooke hit)
62 Fasting period before Easter
63 Vessels such as Noah's

DOWN

1 Student loans, mortgages, and the like
2 "If memory serves . . ."
3 No stranger to danger
4 "Ice Age" sloth voiced by John Leguizamo
5 Stop order?
6 Foot fraction
7 TV's Ally McBeal, for one: Abbr.
8 Lucy of "Ally McBeal"
9 Maker of a 1967 Formula 1 car nicknamed Spaghetti for its tangle of exhaust pipes atop the engine
10 Inventor Howe
11 *Lycée* student
12 Fail to prevail
14 Posts a letter
15 Private stash
17 Martin Luther King, Jr.,'s "Give Us the Ballot," for one
22 ___-Caps (movie candy)
23 Blueprint
24 ___ butter (skin-cream ingredient)
25 Marisa of "My Cousin Vinny"
26 ___ Island (landmark near the Statue of Liberty)
27 Limber
31 Polaris, by another name
32 One of many listed on the Nasdaq
33 Jazz singer Anita who chose her stage surname because it's pig Latin for "dough," which she hoped to make
36 "Almighty" film role for Steve Carell
37 Plaza Hotel resident of children's literature
40 Spewed forth, as nonsense
43 End of the N.A.A.C.P.'s URL
45 "___ Ga Ga" (Queen hit)
46 One of a journalist's five "W"s
47 Hostile look
48 Pianist and music scholar Charles who wrote "The Classical Style"
50 Divisions of a play
51 Eye creepily
52 Tennis score after deuce
53 De-clump, as flour for baking
55 Winged love god
57 Grp. with Cowboys and Broncos
58 Tax-prep pro

Solution to the previous puzzle:

S	T	O	O	P	S	■	■	■	M	A	D	E	D	O
H	A	L	F	O	F	F	■	■	I	G	O	T	I	T
E	X	I	T	E	X	A	M	■	S	E	D	A	N	S
R	I	V	E	T	■	L	O	R	D	N	O	■	■	■
P	E	E	N	■	A	L	B	E	I	T	■	J	A	B
A	D	S	■	O	N	E	I	D	A	■	P	U	P	U
■	■	■	J	O	N	Q	U	E	L	J	O	N	E	S
C	H	E	E	Z	■	U	S	C	■	E	P	O	X	Y
L	I	V	E	E	P	I	S	O	D	E	S	■	■	■
O	V	E	R	■	E	N	T	R	A	P	■	P	S	T
G	E	N	■	H	O	O	R	A	Y	■	G	A	P	E
■	■	■	J	I	N	X	I	T	■	S	I	T	O	N
D	E	N	A	L	I	■	P	E	T	E	R	O	U	T
N	E	E	D	L	E	■	■	S	I	M	L	I	S	H
A	L	W	A	Y	S	■	■	■	M	I	S	S	E	S

Find more puzzles and this week's solution at
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Richard McGuire's Full-Tilt Clock

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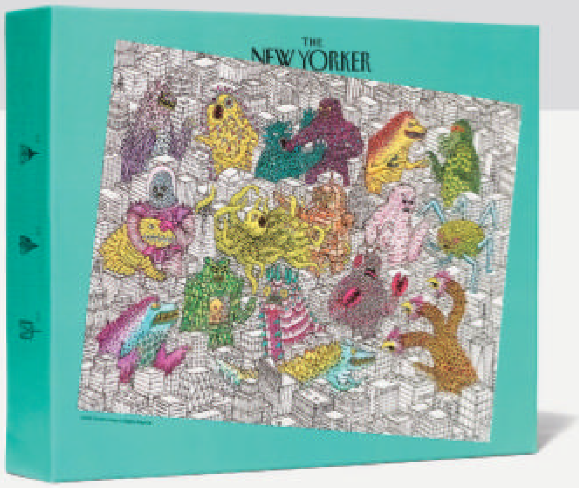
Edward Steed's
"There Goes the Neighborhood" Puzzle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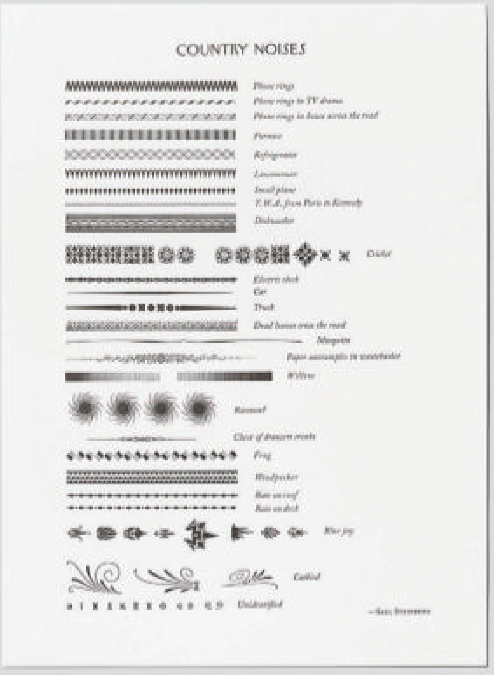
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